

WARRIORS OF PLASM



Home for the Holidays

\$5.95 \$7.75 CANADA



WARRIORS OF
PLASM

*Home
for the
Holidays*



DEFIANT™

JIM SHOOTER
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The seduction of the holidays...

Warm hearths on cold winter nights...aromatic turkeys basting in their juices...street-corner Santas jingling small, tinkly bells...frosted gingerbread men with tiny cinnamon eyes...a menorah's candles being lit one by one...a dreidel spinning on its axis in a child's joyous game...

The crunch of snow beneath an adult's firm steps...crystalline stars aloft in a black December sky...the aromas of hot chocolate mingling with pinecone and evergreen...the rustle of wrapping paper...squeals of delight...the crescendo of yuletide trumpets on a stereo...and sighs of contentment all around...

For our Warriors of PLASM—Mrs. J, Reverend Gilbert, Shooter, Mouse, and Nudge—the holidays have never seemed more remote, more...alien. Having been catapulted from their homes and communities into a place “beyond the imaginary limits,” they are only just beginning to fathom their predicament and grope for their bearings when, quite unexpectedly, it occurs to one and all that...it...is...Christmas.

The smells, the sights, the sounds of the holidays flood their collective senses, but all for naught: These are memories only—PLASM has nothing to offer in their stead. It is a land of Zoms and mulch gullets, of lust-games and Splatterball; it reeks of militarism and hedonism, of spilled gore and imprisoned hearts. It is a land without tradition, without ritual, without “humanity”—it is a land, in short, that couldn't possibly understand “the holidays.”

Or could it?

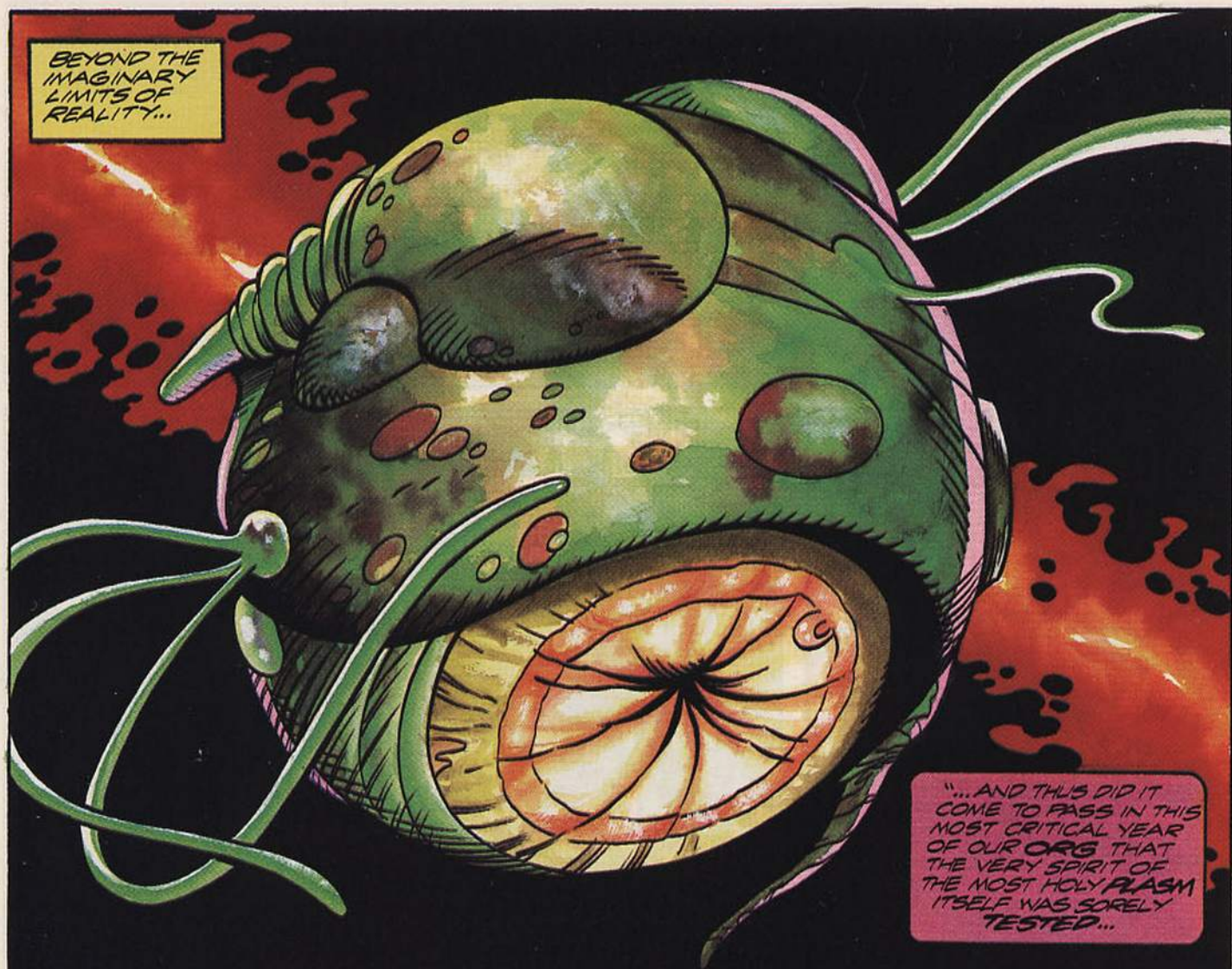
In the pages ahead, Len Wein and Dave Cockrum collaborate on a journey with our five heroes and heroines, depicting them in their innocence, their awakenings, their blunders, and their stupendous attempts to challenge the odds.

Will they ever escape PLASM? Will they ever return to Earth? Will they ever again celebrate Christmas?

Believe it or not, only their hairdresser knows for sure....

Deborah Purcell
Editorial Director

BEYOND THE
IMAGINARY
LIMITS OF
REALITY...



"...AND THIS DID IT
COME TO PASS IN THIS
MOST CRITICAL YEAR
OF OUR ORG THAT
THE VERY SPIRIT OF
THE MOST HOLY PLASM
ITSELF WAS SORELY
TESTED..."

"...AS SUPREME ACQUISITOR
LORCA SWORE TO OVER-
THROW THE LONG, CORRUPT
REIGN OF THE HIGH
EMPEROR HORTCH, AND
THUS BRING ABOUT NEW
ORDER TO THE ORG..."



"...BY TRANSPORTING TEN
THOUSAND SPECIMENS
ACROSS THE FRAGILE
VEIL OF REALITY THAT
SEPARATES PLASM FROM
THE ALIEN PLANET WE
NOW KNOW AS EARTH..."

"LORD LORCA INTENDED TO
USE THESE TEN THOUSAND
AS A REBEL ARMY TO
BATTLE THE UNIFIED FORCES
OF HORTCH..."



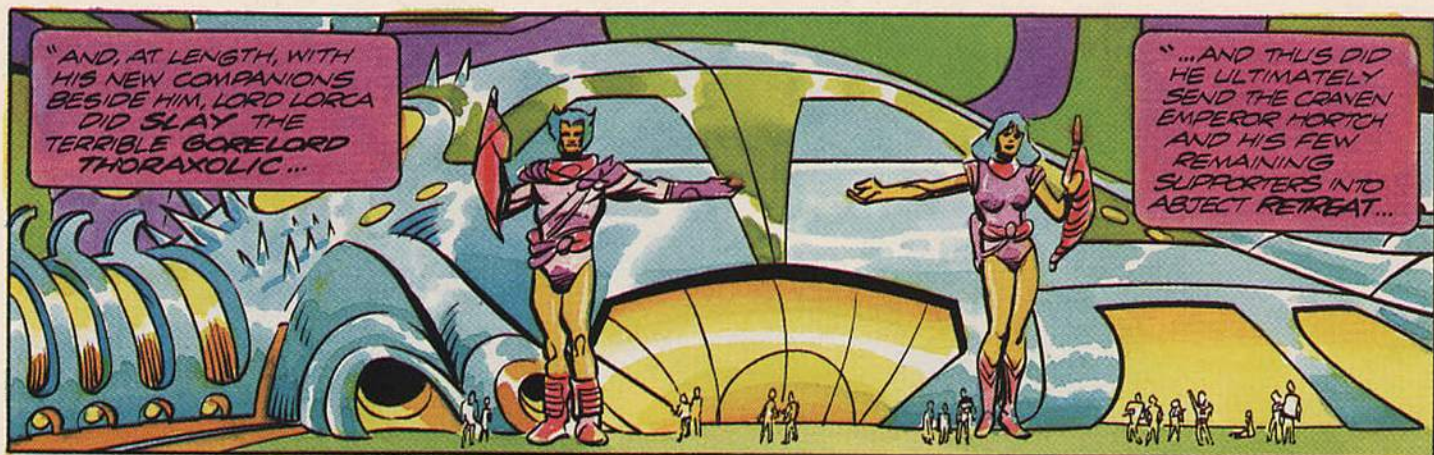
"...BUT, IRONICALLY,
THE GENETIC
REENGINEERING
THAT WAS INTENDED
TO TRANSFORM
THE ALIENS INSTEAD
EXTINGUISHED ALL
BUT FIVE..."

"...WHILE GRANTING THOSE
FEW WHO SURVIVED
EXTRAORDINARY POWERS
AND ABILITIES..."

"AT FIRST, CONVINCED THAT
HIS SCHEME HAD FAILED,
LORD LORCA ATTEMPTED TO
DESTROY THESE FIVE..."



"...BUT INSTEAD HE QUICKLY
CAME TO RESPECT AND
EVEN ADMIRE THEIR SKILLS
AND THEIR COURAGE..."



"AND, AT LENGTH, WITH HIS NEW COMPANIONS BESIDE HIM, LORD LORCA DID SLAY THE TERRIBLE GORELORD THORAXOLIC..."

"...AND THUS DID HE ULTIMATELY SEND THE CRAVEN EMPEROR MORTCH AND HIS FEW REMAINING SUPPORTERS INTO ABJECT RETREAT..."



"...WHERE THEY... THEY..." ORG'S PHLEGM!

AGAIN I'VE LOST MY PLACE.

PLAY-BACK, DICTA-TRON?

"...INTO ABJECT RETREAT, WHERE THEY..."

AH, YES OF COURSE. CONTINUE RECORDING.



"...WHERE THEY CONTINUE TO REMAIN IN HIDING..."

"...WHILE LORD LORCA NOW SITS ON THE THRONE OF OUR PRECIOUS PLASM, RULING JUSTLY AND WISELY TO THIS DAY."

HISTORIANNAL ENTRY CONCLUDED. HIGH HERITOLIO-GIST ANALORE RECORDING.

PRAISE THE ORG, AND ALL HAIL EMPEROR LORCA!



LONG MAY HE--

...EH?



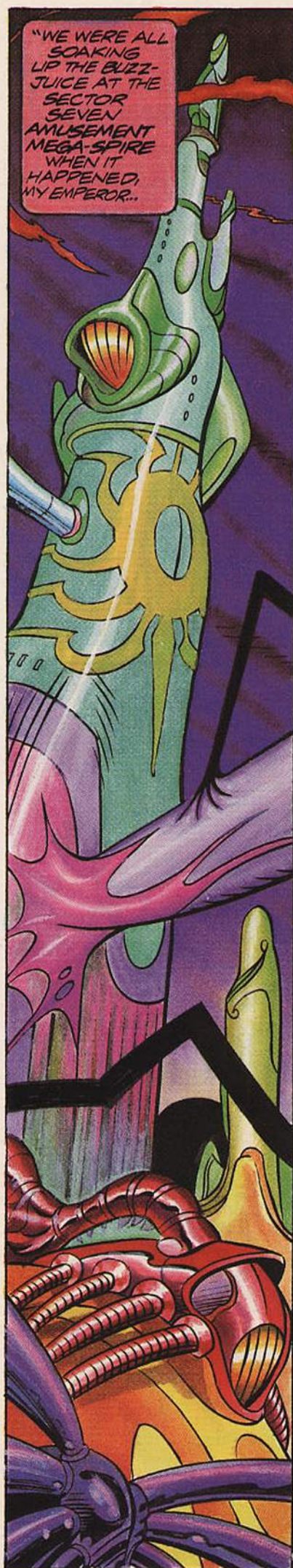
DICTATRON, QUICKLY-- ALERT THE PLASMODIFIERS!

TELL THEM GROUNDSKIN CONSISTENCY AT HEROTUNDA IS ERRATIC--

--WHOLLY UNACCEPT-ABLE FOR--



--ZULK--

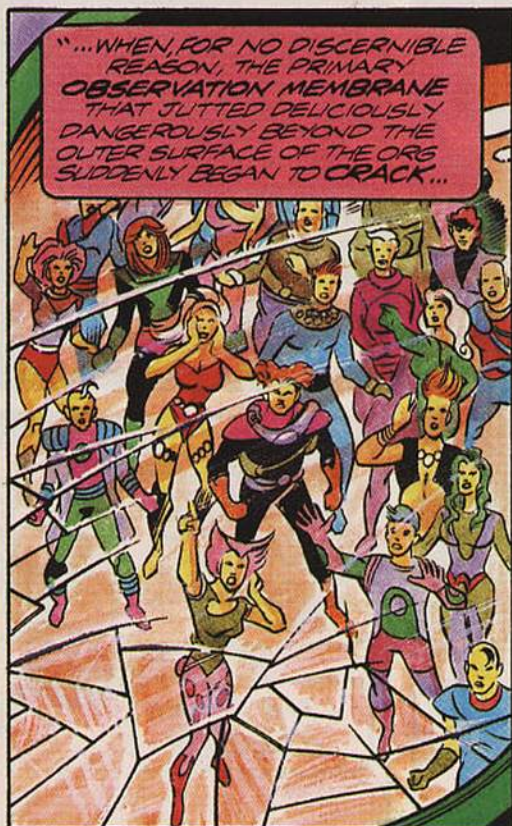


"WE WERE ALL SOAKING UP THE BUZZ-JUICE AT THE SECTOR SEVEN AMUSEMENT MEGA-SPIRE WHEN IT HAPPENED, MY EMPEROR..."



"...EVERYBODY MOVING TO THE PULSATING GYRHYTHMS AND SCANNING THE STARSLUSH AS USUAL..."

"...CELEBRATING OUR NEWFOUND FREEDOMS AND THE OVERTHROW OF THE DESPOT HORTCH..."

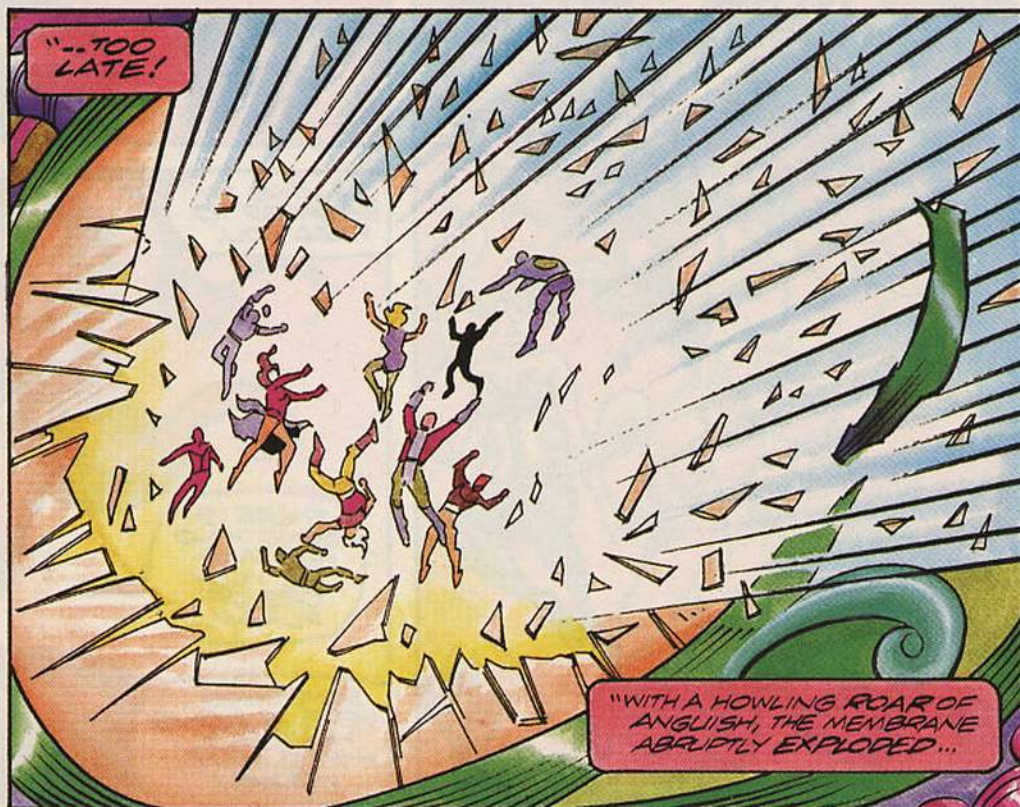


"...WHEN, FOR NO DISCERNIBLE REASON, THE PRIMARY OBSERVATION MEMBRANE THAT JUTTED DELICIOUSLY DANGEROUSLY BEYOND THE OUTER SURFACE OF THE ORG SUDDENLY BEGAN TO CRACK..."



"...AND, DESPITE ALL OUR STROKING AND OUR STRONGEST SUPPLICATIONS, ABRUPTLY SPLINTERED..."

HURRY! SOMEBODY STIMULATE THE EMERGENCY PLAS-PATCH BEFORE IT'S--



"...TOO LATE!"

"WITH A HOWLING ROAR OF ANGLISH, THE MEMBRANE ABRUPTLY EXPLODED..."



"...THE SUDDEN VACUUM SWIFTLY SUCKING THE HORRIFIED REVELERS OUT INTO THE HUNGRY VOID..."



"...WHERE EXPLOSIVE DECOMPRESSION REDUCED ONE AND ALL TO THE VERY PLASM FROM WHICH THEY'D SPRUNG..."

"...SO MUCH PRECIOUS PLASM, NOW LOST TO THE ORG FOREVER!"



"THEN, AS QUICKLY AS IT HAD BEGUN, THE CATASTROPHE WAS ENDED..."

"...THE OBSERVATION MEMBRANE RESEALING ITSELF UNBIDDEN, THE ATMOSPHERE INSTANTLY RESTORED..."



"...LEAVING ONLY ONE SURVIVOR, ONLY ONE WHO HAD MANAGED TO CLING TO A TABLE-TENDRIL TILL HIS FINGERS BLISTERED AND BLED..."

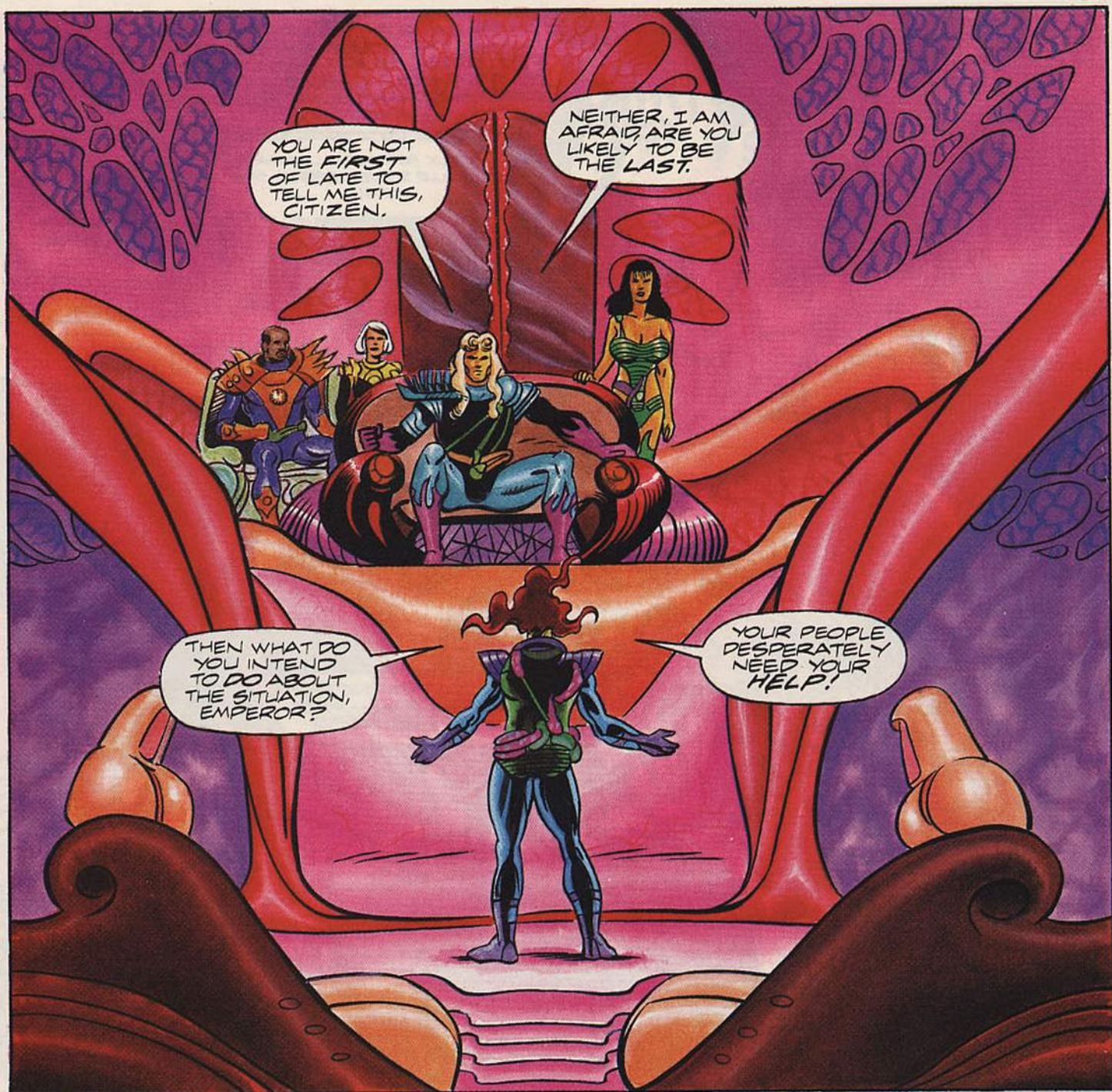
"...AND I WAS THAT ONE, EMPEROR."



I ALONE AM ESCAPED TO TELL YOU.

THERE IS SOMETHING AILING THE HOLY ORG OF PLASM....

SOMETHING HERE IS GOING HORRIBLY, HORRIBLY, HORRIBLY WRONG!



YOU ARE NOT THE **FIRST** OF LATE TO TELL ME THIS, CITIZEN.

NEITHER, I AM AFRAID, ARE YOU LIKELY TO BE THE LAST.

THEN WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT THE SITUATION, EMPEROR?

YOUR PEOPLE DESPERATELY NEED YOUR **HELP!**



I AM WELL AWARE OF THAT THESE DAYS, CITIZEN....

IT IS ALL I HAVE HEARD SINCE I FIRST **TOOK** THIS THRONE.

BUT, EMPEROR, I--

YOUR PLEA HAS BEEN **HEARD**, PLASMOID, AND WILL BE TAKEN UNDER ADVISEMENT.


YOU ARE **EXCUSED**.



HIGH GORELORD SUEFACEEN, YOU MAY NOW CALL THE NEXT PLAINTANT.

ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU'D RATHER NOT SIMPLY HAVE ME **MULCH** THE LOT OF THEM, LUST-MATE?

PLEASE, SUE, DO NOT **TEMPT** ME.



IN THE NAME OF THE MOST HIGH ORG OF
PLASM, THE NOBLE **EMPEROR LORCA**,
PROTECTOR OF HIS PEOPLE, DEFENDER
OF THE FAITHFUL, BIDS YOU STEP FOR-
WARD AND MAKE YOUR **PURPOSE**
KNOWN.

ONLY FOR **YOU**, LUST-MATE,
WOULD I EVEN **SPEAK** THIS
DRIVEL.

THE VERY WORDS
MAKE MY **GORGE**
RISE.

OBJECTION NOTED,
SLERACEEN--AND
APPRECIATED.



MY EMPEROR,
I AM SORELY
TROUBLED...

...AND DO NOT
KNOW WHERE
ELSE TO
TURN.

I HUMBL
SEEK YOUR
WISE
COUNSEL.

Y'KNOW, THE MORE I LISTEN TO ALL THIS, MRS. J, THE MORE I GROW CONCERNED.

I COMPLETELY AGREE, REVEREND...

SOUNDS LIKE THE STRUCTURAL STRESSES THE PLANET'S BEEN SUFFERING JUST KEEP GETTING WORSE.



THE BASIC PROBLEM IS THAT THE ORG OF PLASM CONSTANTLY NEEDS NEW BIOMASS IN ORDER TO SUSTAIN ITSELF...

...AND WITHOUT A CONSTANT INFUX OF BIOMASS FROM CONQUERED PLANETS, IT SEEMS PLASM HAS FINALLY BEGUN TO FEED ON ITSELF.

WHICH LEAVES US WHERE?

I MEAN, WE CAN'T LET THE PLASMOIDS GO BACK TO ENGLUFING AND DEVOURING OTHER WORLDS, CAN WE?

NO, OF COURSE NOT.

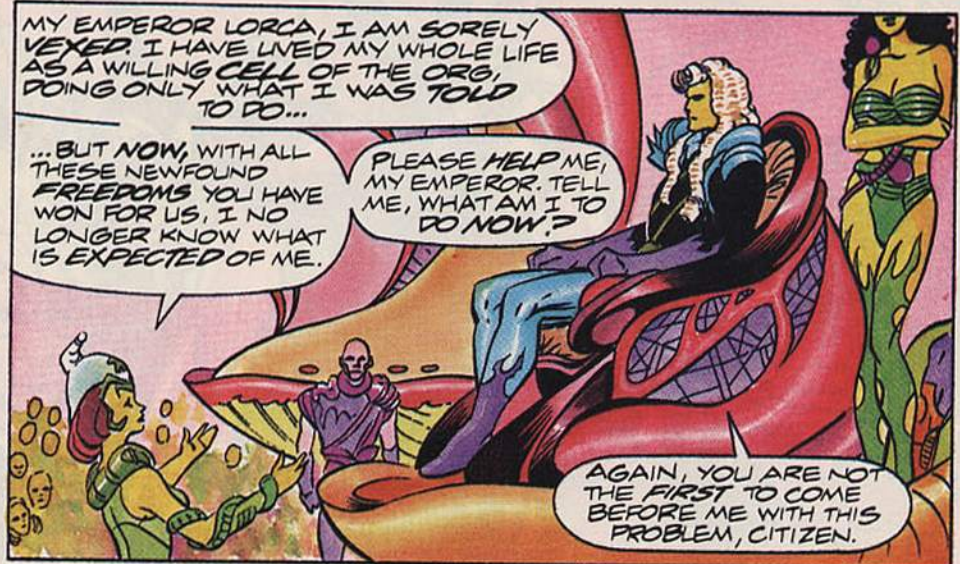
IT JUST MEANS THIS PLANET AND ITS POPULACE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT THEY ALREADY HAVE.



MY EMPEROR LORCA, I AM SORELY VEXED I HAVE LIVED MY WHOLE LIFE AS A WILLING CELL OF THE ORG, DOING ONLY WHAT I WAS TOLD TO DO...

...BUT NOW, WITH ALL THESE NEWFOUND FREEDOMS YOU HAVE WON FOR US, I NO LONGER KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME.

PLEASE HELP ME, MY EMPEROR. TELL ME, WHAT AM I TO DO NOW?



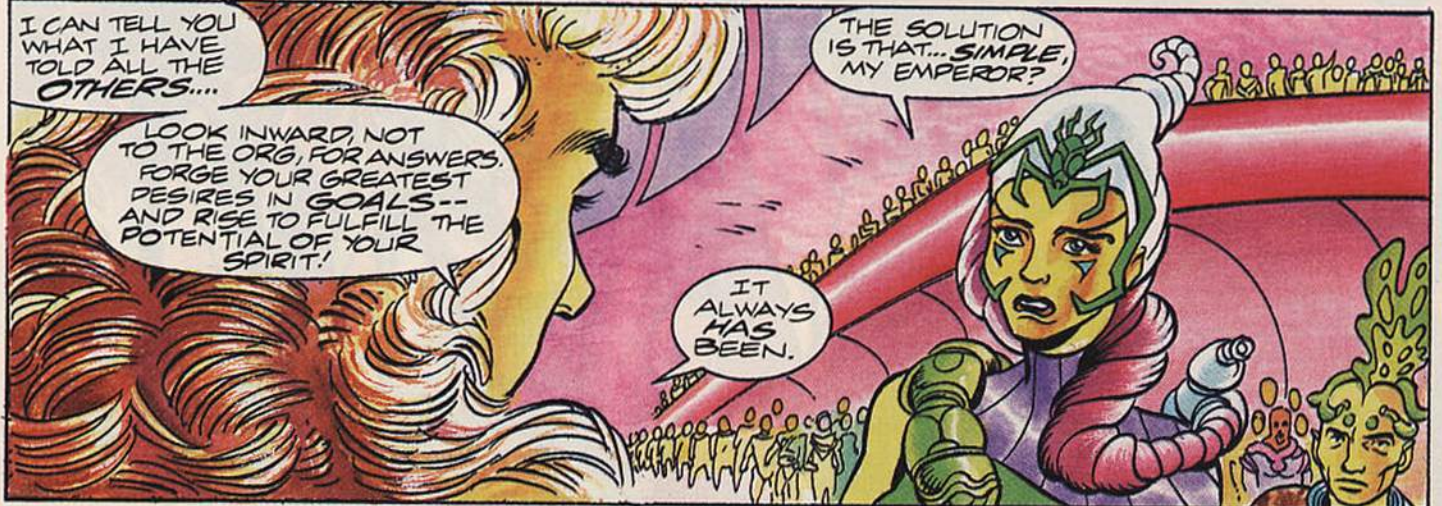
AGAIN, YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST TO COME BEFORE ME WITH THIS PROBLEM, CITIZEN.

I CAN TELL YOU WHAT I HAVE TOLD ALL THE OTHERS....

LOOK INWARD, NOT TO THE ORG, FOR ANSWERS. FORGE YOUR GREATEST DESIRES IN GOALS-- AND RISE TO FULFILL THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR SPIRIT!

THE SOLUTION IS THAT...SIMPLE, MY EMPEROR?

IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN.





NOW THAT WASN'T HALF BAD, REVEREND GILBERT.

I'M STARTING TO THINK LORCA MIGHT FINALLY BE GETTING THE HANG OF THIS.

LET'S NOT GET OUR HOPES UP TOO SOON, MRS. J.

THE DAY IS STILL YOUNG.



NEXT PETITIONER, APPROACH THE EMPEROR, AND SPEAK.

EMPEROR LORCA, I NEED YOUR WISDOM.

I'VE A PROBLEM WITH MY PROPERTY...



FOR MANY CYCLES NOW, MY NEAREST NEIGHBOR AND I HAVE ARGUED THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN US-- AND I CAN TOLERATE THE CONFLICT NO LONGER!

A FAIR DECISION MUST BE REACHED, MY EMPEROR.

HERE.

NOW.

BY YOU.

HOW SHALL THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN OUR PROPERTIES BE DETERMINED?



HMMMMMM...

AT LAST, A PUZZLE WITH A SIMPLE SOLUTION.



HAVE YOU CONSIDERED FACING ONE ANOTHER ON THE SPLATTERBALL FIELDS?

THE DNABLERS CAN RECONSTRUCT YOU BOTH AS NECESSARY...

...AND HE WHO SURVIVES WOULD THEN OWN BOTH PROPERTIES.



YOU WERE SAYING...?

AND HE WAS DOING SO WELL...





GORELORD,
SEND THOSE
REMAINING
AWAY!

I'LL DEAL WITH THE
REST OF THEIR
PETTY PROBLEMS
TOMORROW.

AS YOU
COMMAND,
MY EMPEROR.

GO HOME, ALL OF YOU!
YOUR EMPEROR WILL
SEE NO MORE PETITIONERS
TODAY!

BUT WE'VE
WAITED SO
LONG....

LEAVE NOW--OR
I WILL HAPPILY
TWISTRIIP YOU
WHERE YOU STAND!

WHAT IS IT,
LORCA? IS
SOMETHING
WRONG?

WHY DIDN'T
YOU TELL ME
IT WOULD BE
LIKE THIS, MRS.
JOHNSON?

ALL THE PRESSURE...
ALL THE PROBLEMS...
ALL THE PAIN...



BE LIKE
WHAT?



IT'S ALMOST
MORE THAN
ONE CAN
BEAR....



BELIEVE ME,
SON, I KNOW
HOW YOU
FEEL...

...BUT I'M AFRAID
IT COMES WITH
THE TERRITORY.

YOU'RE
MISSING
THE POINT,
EARTHMAN.



I'M
SORRY,
BUT I
DON'T--

CAN'T
YOU
UNDER-
STAND?

ALL DAY LONG
I'VE AN END--
LESS LINE
OF PEOPLE
TELLING ME
THEIR
TROUBLES--



--BUT WHO AM I
SUPPOSED TO
TELL MY
TROUBLES TO?

THOUGH EMPEROR HORTCH
WAS CORRUPT, HE MUST HAVE
FACED GREAT PRESSURE, TOO.
I WONDER HOW HE REMAINED
SO JOVIAL?

WHILE IN THE SHADOW OF THE GREAT PALACE OF THE EMPEROR...

SO MUCH NEEDLESS DESTRUCTION, COOKIE... SO MUCH WASTE...

WE DID WHAT WE HAD TO DO, RICK-- ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT.

BESIDES, MY FRIENDS, ON PLASM NOTHING IS EVER WASTED-- IT'S MERELY RECYCLED.

THE MULCHERS ARE ALWAYS AT HAND, ALWAYS HUNGRY.

STILL, COB, IT FEELS GOOD TO BE BUILDING SOMETHING LIFE-AFFIRMING FOR A CHANGE...

...AFTER SO MUCH TIME SPENT TAKING LIFE ON THE SPLATTERBALL FIELDS

YEAH... UNLIKE SPLATTERBALL, A LITTLE HARD WORK NEVER KILLED ANYONE.

I'VE DONE CONSTRUCTION BEFORE, GRIMMAX...

...AND LET ME TELL YOU, IT'S A HIGH YOU NEVER GET TIRED OF!

JUST WHAT IS IT WE ARE BUILDING HERE, FRIEND NUDGE?

WELL, IT STARTED OUT TO BE A CONDO...

...BUT NOW I'M AFRAID IT'S ANYBODY'S GUESS!

PERHAPS IF WE WAIT UNTIL IT IS FINISHED...

...ALTHOUGH I AM NOT CERTAIN EVEN THAT WOULD HELP...

EVERYBODY'S A CRITIC!

WELL, YOU ALL SURE LOOK BUSY.

HOW'S IT COMING, KIDS?

DEPENDS ON WHO YOU ASK.

WHAT OF
FRIEND
SHOOTER
THEN?

HOW
DOES
HE
FEEL
ABOUT
THIS?

DESPITE MY
ABILITY TO SEE
INSIDE PEOPLE'S
MINDS, OOB, I
RARELY KNOW
WHAT SHOOTER
IS THINKING...

... AND,
FRANKLY,
I'M USUALLY
AFRAID
TO FIND
OUT.

WELL, TO BE
HONEST...
NO.

WE'VE BEEN
STUCK HERE
SO LONG, I'VE
KINDA LOST
TRACK OF
TIME BACK ON
EARTH.

WHY
DO YOU
ASK?

BUT HE SEEMS IN
SUCH PAIN AT THE
MOMENT...

GOD, I HATE
IT WHEN YOU'RE
RIGHT....

SHOOTER?
ELVIS? YOU
OKAY?

HUH?

YEAH, I'M
JUST SWELL,
WAZZENEGGER...

WHAT'S
YOUR
PROBLEM?

I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM,
SHOOTER-- BUT IT SURE
FEELS LIKE YOU DO.

WANNA
TELL ME
ABOUT IT?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TOMORROW IS?

BECAUSE
TOMORROW
IS
DECEMBER
25TH.

--AND YOU
GOTTA
KNOW WHAT
THAT
MEANS!

OH...NO...

WE'RE GOING TO MISS CHRISTMAS!



MY POOR GRANDKIDS! KEITH... KEVEN...! AND I'D ALREADY BOUGHT THEIR PRESENTS!



FIRST TIME IN 22 YEARS I'LL MISS DOING THE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE.



MY FOLKS... MY BROTHER, MIKE... AND ME... WE ALWAYS HAVE CHRISTMAS TOGETHER...

EVEN THE YEAR I LOST MY ARM, THEY CAME TO THE HOSPITAL...

WE NEVER MISS THE DAY...



WELL, I'VE ALREADY MISSED HANUKKAH...



...BUT EVERY YEAR ON CHRISTMAS DAY, I HELP SPREAD A LITTLE HOLIDAY CHEER AT A LOCAL SOLIP KITCHEN.

CAN'T BELIEVE I'M NOT GONNA BE THERE...



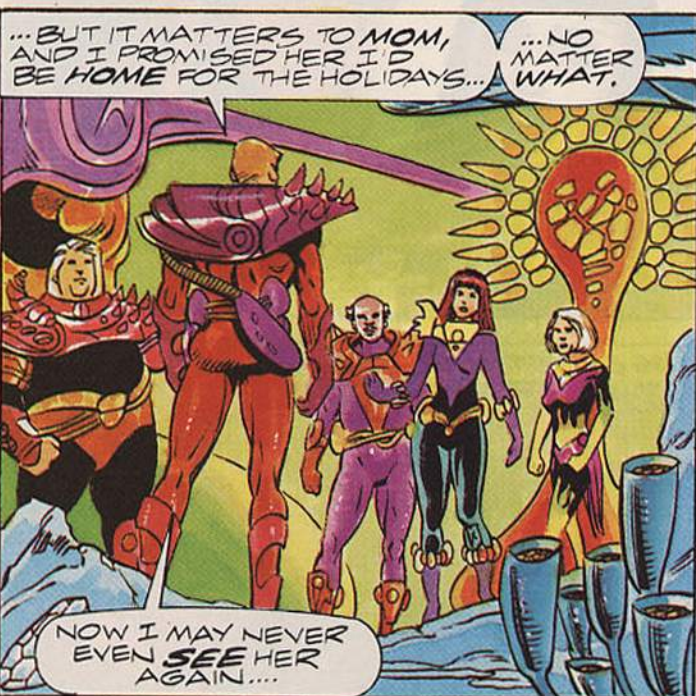
WHAT ABOUT YOU, SHOOTER?

YOU NEVER STRUCK ME AS THE SORT OF GUY WHO'D EVEN CARE ABOUT CHRISTMAS.

AND I DON'T...



...NOT REALLY...



...BUT IT MATTERS TO MOM, AND I PROMISED HER I'D BE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS...

...NO MATTER WHAT.

NOW I MAY NEVER EVEN SEE HER AGAIN...



THAT'S TRUE FOR ALL OF US, SHOOTER-- WE ALL HAVE LOVED ONES WE MAY HAVE LOST FOREVER.

BUT THAT WAS THE CHOICE WE MADE WHEN WE DECIDED TO STAY ON PLASM...

...AND, LIKE IT OR NOT, IT'S A CHOICE WE HAVE TO LIVE WITH.





SHOOTER'S
RIGHT,
PEOPLE...

...THAT'S
ENOUGH
MOPING.

WE HAVE
A **JOB**
TO DO
HERE...

...SO WE
MIGHT
AS WELL
GET ON
WITH IT!

...EVERYTHING
I **TOUCH**
FEELS LIKE
IT'S COVERED
WITH **SNAIL
SLIME**.

I REALLY
HATE
HANDLING
THIS
STUFF...

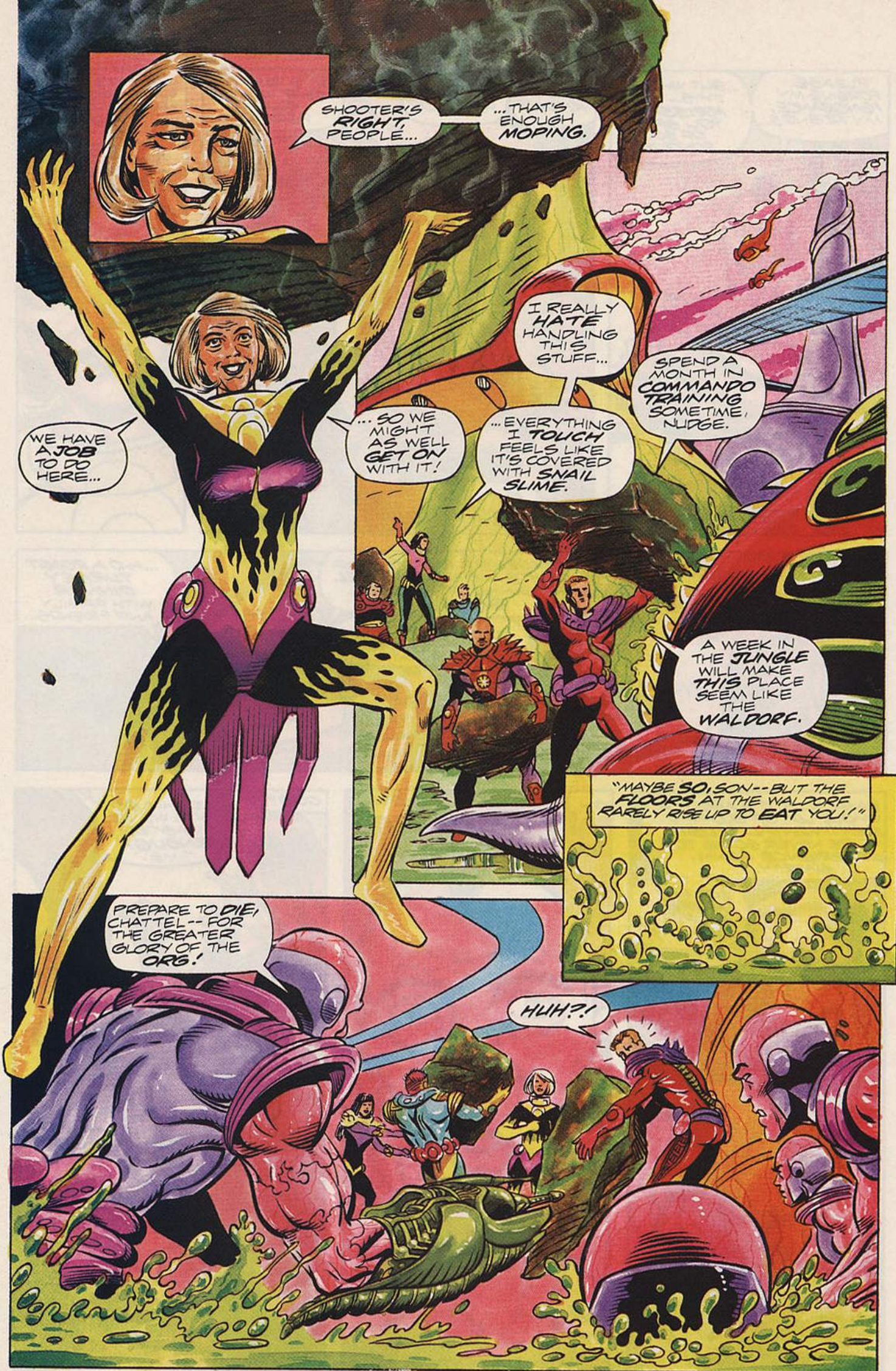
SPEND A
MONTH IN
**COMMANDO
TRAINING**
SOMETIME,
NURGE.

A WEEK IN
THE **JUNGLE**
WILL MAKE
THIS PLACE
SEEM LIKE
THE
WALDORF.

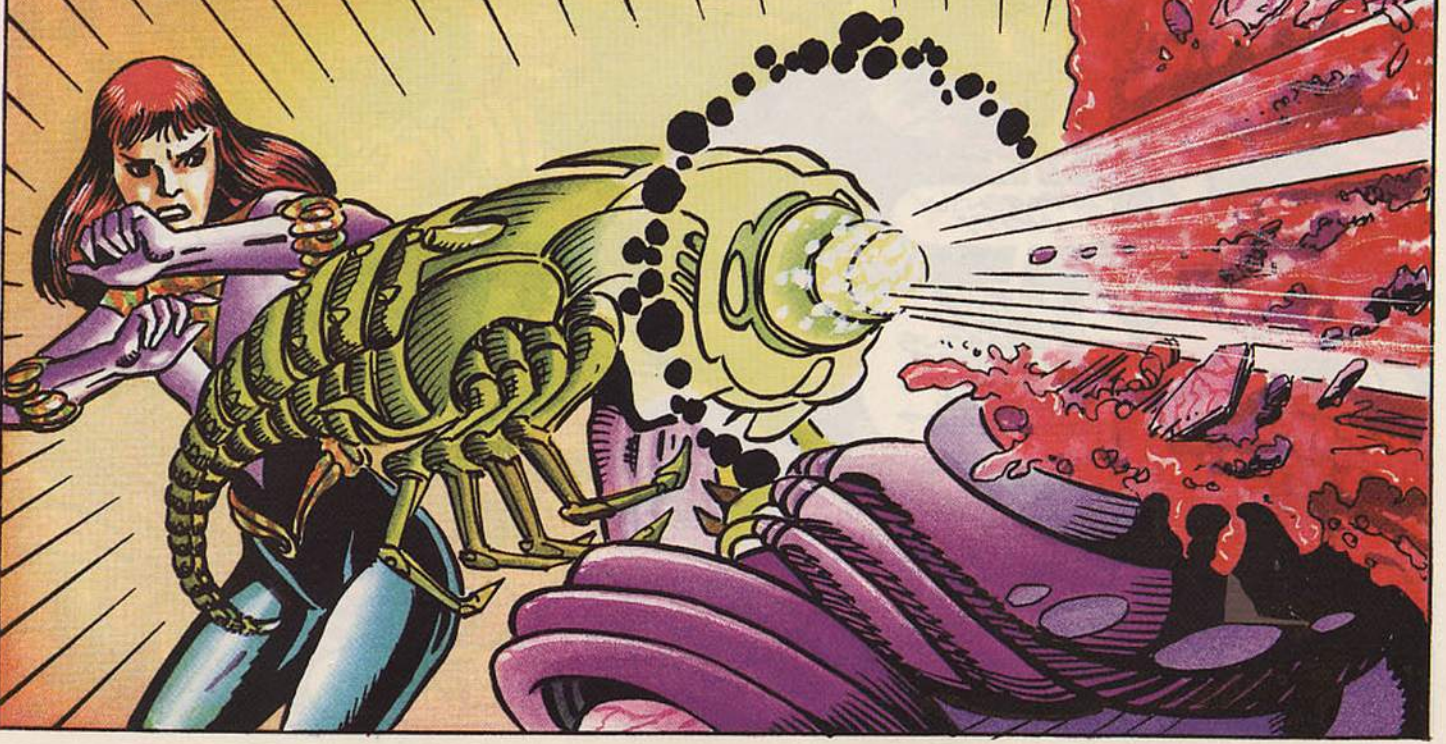
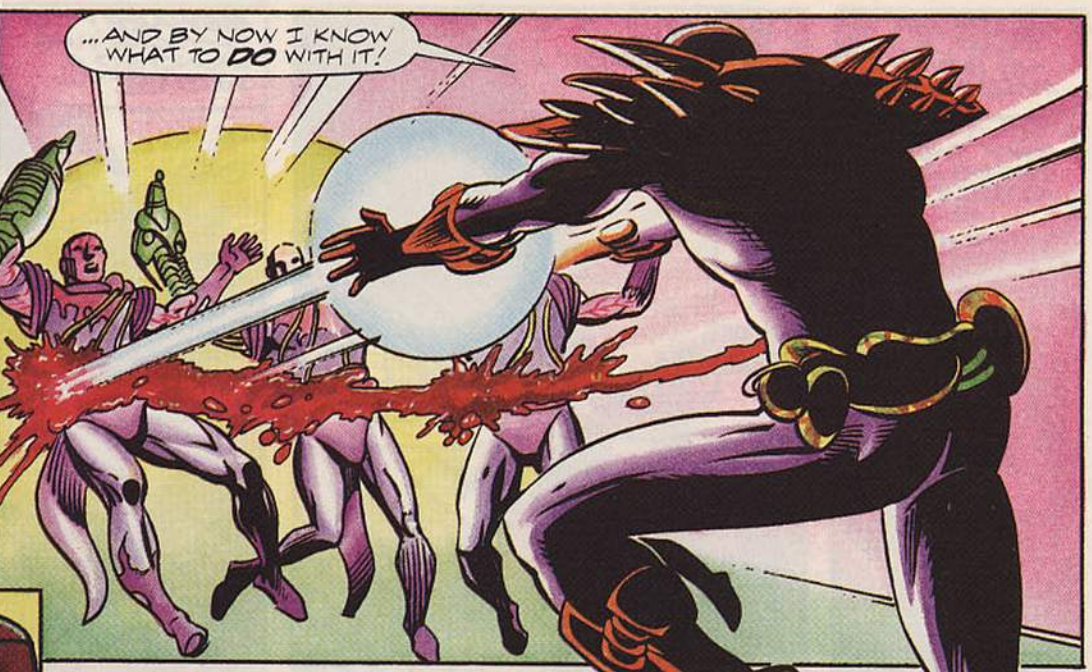
"MAYBE SO, SON-- BUT THE
FLOORS AT THE WALDORF
RARELY RISE UP TO EAT YOU!"

PREPARE TO DIE,
CHATEL-- FOR
THE GREATER
GLORY OF THE
ORG!

HUH?!









QUESTION IS, WHERE DID THESE ZOMS COME FROM...

...AND WHY ARE THEY ATTACKING US?



GUESS THAT'LL HAVE TO BE GOOD ENOUGH.



FORWARD, TRAMPLE-ZOMS! LET THE BATTLE BE JOINED!

LET THE GORE RUN RICH AND THICK!

THESE BATTLE-ZOMS ARE UNLIKE ANY I'VE EVER SEEN!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, LORD LORCA?



WHAT MATTER WHOSE HAND, MY EMPEROR?

THEIR GORE RUNS JUST AS RED.



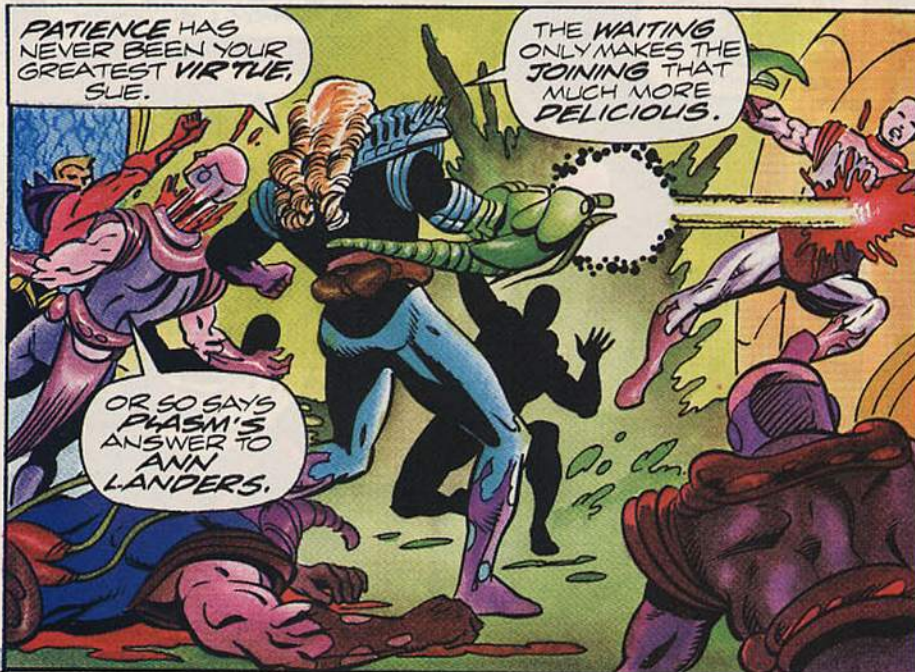
THEY ARE THE WORK OF A TREACHEROUS HAND!



LET THIS BATTLE BE ENDED QUICKLY, LUST-MATE.

YOU KNOW HOW THE TANG OF THIS MUCH GORE TWEAKS ME.

I MUST JOIN WITH YOU--AND SOON.



PATIENCE HAS NEVER BEEN YOUR GREATEST VIRTUE, SUE.

THE WAITING ONLY MAKES THE JOINING THAT MUCH MORE DELICIOUS.

OR SO SAYS PHASM'S ANSWER TO ANN LANDERS.



BEFORE THIS DAY IS ENDED, LORCA, THE GORE RUNNING DEEPEST WILL BE YOURS!

THAT VOICE...





I'LL TWISTRIIP
YOUR BULBS
AND FEED THEM
TO YOU FOR THAT,
SLURACEEN!

I'VE WAITED
A LONG TIME
TO AVENGE
MYSELF
AGAINST YOU!



THEN YOU'LL
HAVE TO
WAIT A
WHILE
LONGER,
GORE
LORD!

WHO--?



SURELY YOU
REMEMBER
THE GREAT
GRIMMAX,
GORE LORD.

PHLEGM!
WE AREN'T
PREPARED
TO BATTLE
THIS LARGE
A FORCE.

YOU WAGERED
ON MY SKILL A
TIME OR TWO AT THE
SPLATTERBALL
GAMES.

I TOLD
HIM IT WAS
TOO SOON
TO ATTACK.
HE'S THE
FOOL!



RETREAT, MY
GRIND-ZOMS!

WE WILL TASTE
OF VICTORY
ANOTHER DAY!



AFTER THEM!
THEY MUST
NOT
ESCAPE!

DON'T
SWEAT
IT,
LORCA.

THEY CAN'T
RUN FAR
OR FAST
ENOUGH.

THESE EARTH
DOGS.
THEY'RE
NIPPING AT
OUR HEELS...



...BUT LEST THEY THINK
THEY MIGHT ACTUALLY
TREE US...



HOW...

THE GROUND
IS ERUPTING!

BLOCKING
OUR
PURSUIT!

WE WILL
MEET
AGAIN,
FOOLS!

COUNT
ON IT!



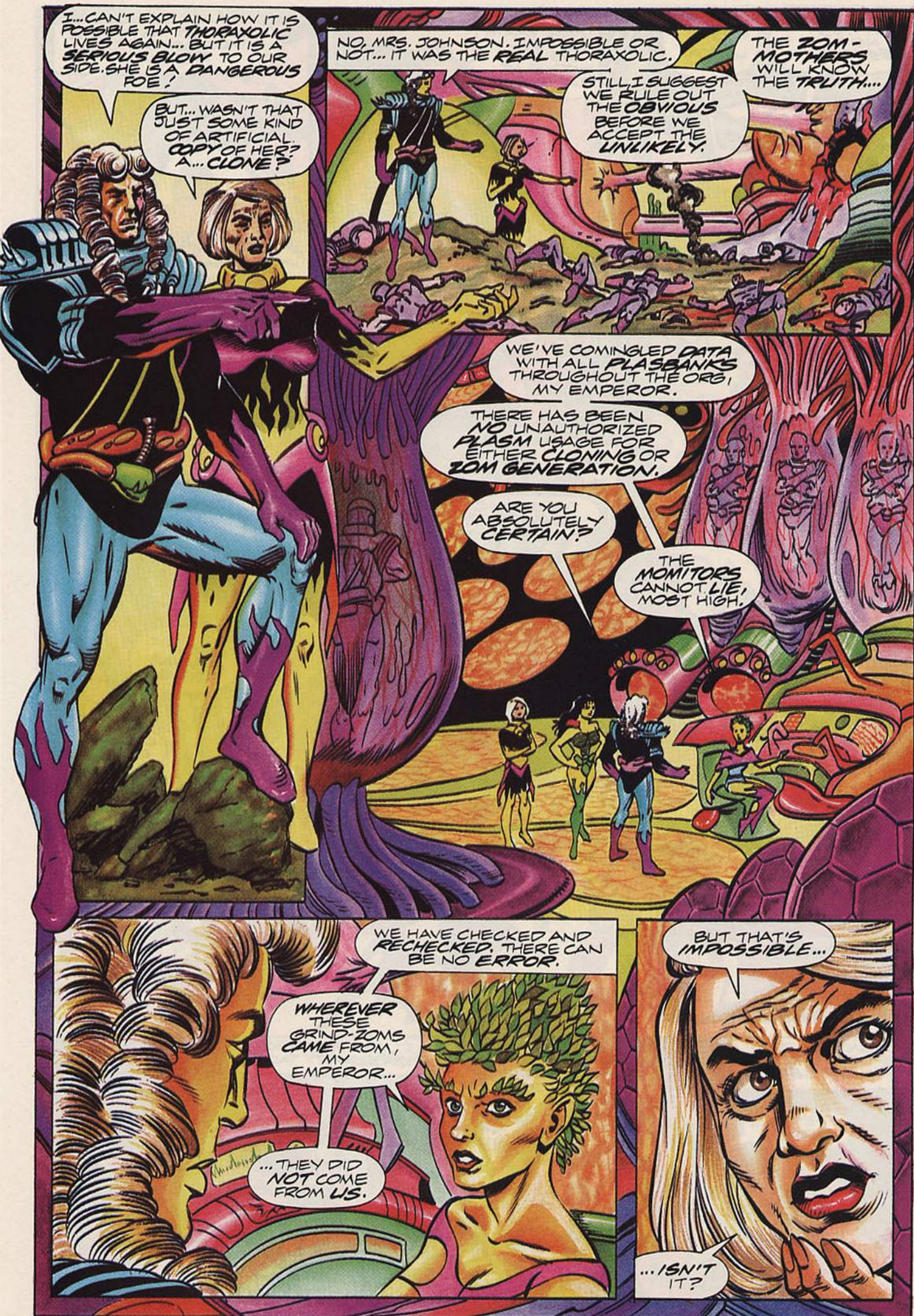
MOMENTS LATER,
WHEN THE GROUND-
SKIN SETTLES...

THEY'RE...
GONE!

THAT DOESN'T
REALLY
SURPRISE
YOU, DOES IT?

IT WAS A PERFECT
DIVERSIONARY TACTIC.

THORAXOLIC HAD...
HAS ONE OF THE
FINEST MILITARY
MINDS IN THE ORG.



I... CAN'T EXPLAIN HOW IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THORAXOLIC LIVES AGAIN... BUT IT IS A **SERIOUS BLOW** TO OUR SIDE. SHE IS A DANGEROUS FOE!

BUT... WASN'T THAT JUST SOME KIND OF ARTIFICIAL COPY OF HER? A... CLONE?

NO, MRS. JOHNSON. IMPOSSIBLE OR NOT... IT WAS THE REAL THORAXOLIC.

THE ZOM-MOTHERS WILL KNOW THE TRUTH...

STILL I SUGGEST WE RULE OUT THE OBVIOUS BEFORE WE ACCEPT THE UNLIKELY.

WE'VE COMINGLED DATA WITH ALL PLASBANKS THROUGHOUT THE ORG, MY EMPEROR.

THERE HAS BEEN NO UNAUTHORIZED PLASM USAGE FOR EITHER CLONING OR ZOM GENERATION.

ARE YOU ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN?

THE MONITORS CANNOT LIE, MOST HIGH!

WE HAVE CHECKED AND RECHECKED. THERE CAN BE NO ERROR.

WHEREVER THESE GRIND-ZOMS CAME FROM, MY EMPEROR...

...THEY DID NOT COME FROM US.

BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE...

...ISN'T IT?

AND THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS
GANGLIANUS
WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY
TO PROVIDE!

SEE? SHE IS ALMOST
DONE BIRTHING YOUR
NEWEST BATTALION OF
BATTLE-ZOMS.

HMM. I STILL DON'T
KNOW HOW YOU
MANAGED TO LOCATE
THE LEGENDARY
LIVING HEART
OF THE ORG...

...LET ALONE HOW
YOU CONVINCED
HER TO SUPPORT
YOUR CAUSE...

...SO YOU WILL
FORGIVE ME
IF I REMAIN
A TRIFLE
SKEPTICAL.





THE EMPERORS OF PLASM HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN THE WHEREABOUTS OF GANGLIANUS, GORE LORD.

IT IS A **SECRET** PASSED FROM EACH EMPEROR TO HIS **SUCCESSOR...**

...A SECRET I WITHHELD FROM LORCA WHEN HE **STOLE** MY PRECIOUS **THRONE!**

IT DOES SEEM A WASTE...

IT WOULD BE SO MUCH SIMPLER IF LORCA WOULD SEE THE **ERROR** OF HIS WAYS.



...IF WE COULD **CONVINCE** HIM TO RETURN MY **THRONE...**

...EVERYTHING WOULD ONCE AGAIN BE AS IT **SHOULD BE!**



WHAT AN **EXTRAORDINARY** DISPLAY OF **NAIVETÉ**, HORTCH.

LORCA WILL SOON BE **MULCH-FODDER**, HORTCH...

...AND THAT WILL BE THE **END** OF THIS **TRAITOROUS STENCH.**

WHY, IN THE NAME OF THE **ORG**, WOULD LORCA HAVE ANY **INTEREST** IN **RETREATING** NOW?



OH, I THINK I MIGHT HAVE A WAY TO **PERSUADE** HIM.



WHILE, IN LORCA'S CENTRUM...

HAVE I MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE...?

WITHOUT MY BEAUTIFUL LAYGEN AT MY SIDE TO HELP **GUIDE** ME, SHOULD I EVER HAVE PRESUMED TO **RULE** THE GREAT ORG OF PLASM?

LAYGEN... ORG'S HEART, HOW I STILL MISS YOU...

ZOM-MOTHER, IN YOUR DATA-MEMS YOU RETAIN DNA FROM A LOCK OF LAYGEN'S HAIR.

GIVE HER FORM IN **FLESH** AGAIN, ZOM-MOTHER.

EVEN UNDER YOUR RULE, CLONES REMAIN **ILLEGAL**, MY EMPEROR.

PLEASE... DO IT!

VERY WELL, THEN...

I HAVE **CLOTHED** HER AND **EDUCATED** HER ABOUT HERSELF AS USUAL, MY EMPEROR.

ENJOY HER.

LORCA, YOU SEEM **TROUBLED**...

AS WELL I **SHOULD** BE...

RULING THE ORG IS A TASK FAR **BEYOND** MY **IMAGININGS**, LAYGEN.

OUR PROBLEMS ARE **MANY** AND VERY **COMPLEX**.

I SHALL... **TRY**.

WELCOME BACK... MY **LOVE**.

I HAD NO IDEA...

...I COULD FEEL SO... **AFRAID**.

THE OTHERWORLDERS ARE WISE AND STEADFAST... STILL, THEY CANNOT TRULY UNDERSTAND THE INTRICACIES OF THE ORG...

AND... TO FACE THE CHALLENGES ALONE...

IF THERE IS ANYONE WITH THE SPIRIT, THE STRENGTH OF WILL, TO ACCOMPLISH THE JOB, BELOVED...

THOUGH YOU LOOK LIKE LAYGEN, SOUND LIKE LAYGEN, YOU ARE STILL ONLY A CLONE!

THE TRUE LAYGEN IS IRRETRIEVABLY DEAD...

...AND LOST TO ME FOREVER!

...IT IS YOU! I AM CERTAIN THAT--

NO!

SAY NO MORE!

I WILL HEAR NO MORE!

WHAT IS WRONG, MY LOVE?

THIS IS WRONG!

YOU ARE WRONG!

UNEASY LIES THE HEAD THAT WEARS A CROWN... EH, LORCA?

WHO--?





I ALREADY HAVE WHAT MY HEART DESIRES.

THE ORG IS CHANGING... THE ORG IS LEARNING...

...AND IF YOU DEVIOUSLY ATTEMPT TO UNDO THIS PROGRESS...

...I SWEAR I WILL FIND YOU AND FEED YOU TO THE MULCHERS MYSELF...

...INCH BY PUSTULATING INCH!



JUST CONSIDER MY OFFER, LORCA.

I'LL BE IN TOUCH.

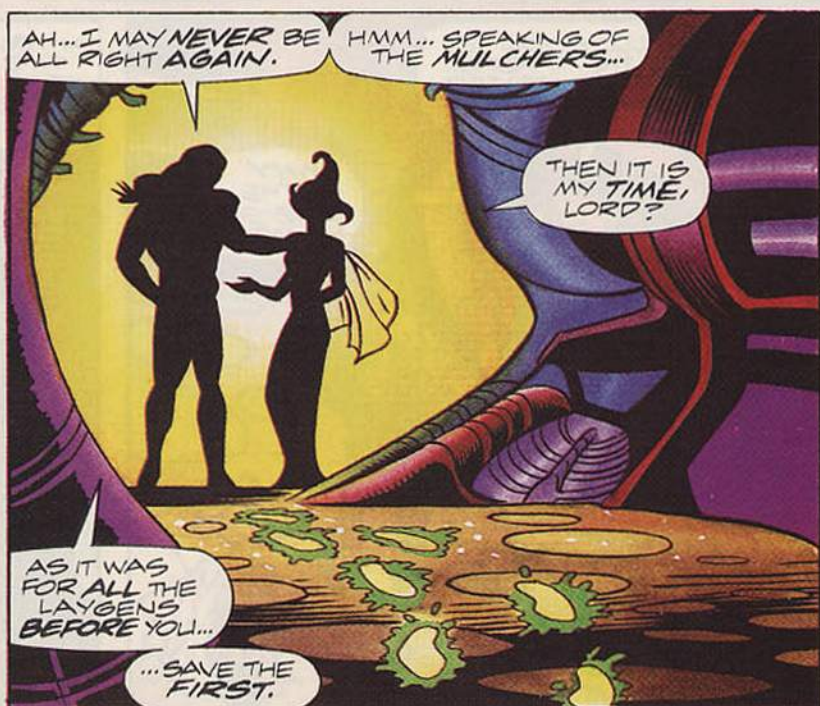
DON'T PRESS YOUR LUCK, HORTCH!

HORTCH?



PHLEGM.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, BELOVED?



AH... I MAY NEVER BE ALL RIGHT AGAIN.

HMM... SPEAKING OF THE MULCHERS...

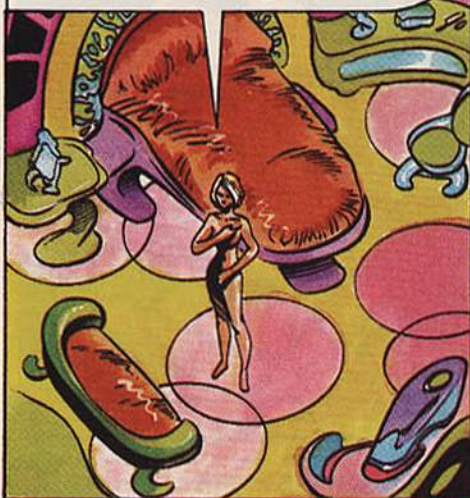
THEN IT IS MY TIME, LORD?

AS IT WAS FOR ALL THE LAYGENS BEFORE YOU...

...SAVE THE FIRST.

LOUISE JOHNSON'S PERSONAL
QUARTERS...

I KNOW MY CLOTHES GOT
PRETTY **TORN UP** DURING
THAT LITTLE SKIRMISH
WITH **THORAXOLIC** AND
HER BOYS...



...BUT I DON'T THINK
I'LL EVER GET USED
TO THE WAY I CAN
JUST **GROW** MYSELF
A NEW OUTFIT
WHenever I **NEED**
ONE!



TRUTH TO
TELL, I DON'T
THINK I'LL
EVER **REALLY**
GET USED
TO ANY OF
THIS.

IT'S ALL
LIKE SOME
TERRIBLE
DREAM...

...SOME
HIDEOUS
NIGHT-
MARE...



...LIKE SEEING THE WORLD
REFLECTED IN A TWISTED
FUNHOUSE MIRROR,
WHERE NOTHING IS AS
IT'S **SUPPOSED** TO BE...

OH, OOB... SUCH A SWEET
PICTURE OF MY FAMILY
YOU MADE... BUT IT MAKES
ME **MISS** THEM ALL SO
MUCH.



I SWEAR I'LL FIND A
WAY TO GET **BACK**
TO YOU BEFORE--



FRIEND
LOUISE?

WHO?!

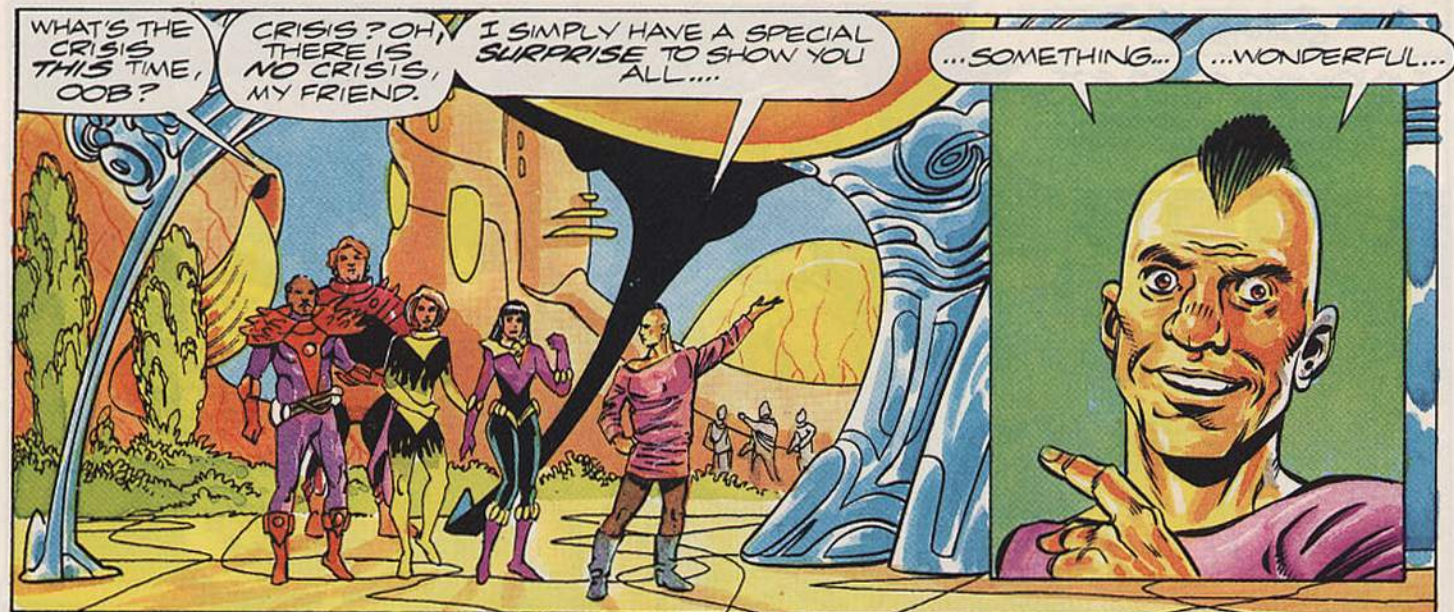
OH.

I'D LIKE YOU
TO **COME** WITH
US, MRS.
JOHNSON.

AND WHAT
ARE YOU
ALL DOING
HERE?

THERE IS
SOMETHING
YOU MUST
SEE.











WHILE AT THE HEART OF THE ORG...

I WARNED YOU
LORCA WOULDN'T
LISTEN.

THE ONLY WAY TO
TAKE THE THRONE
IS BY FORCE!

I'M STILL NOT CONVINCED
OF THAT, GORE LORD.

NO, OUR
PROBLEM
ISN'T
LORCA--

--IT'S THOSE
FINE FOUL
OFF-
WORLDERS
HE'S SUR-
ROUNDED
HIMSELF
WITH!

IF WE
COULD
JUST
RID
OUR-
SELVES
OF
THEM...

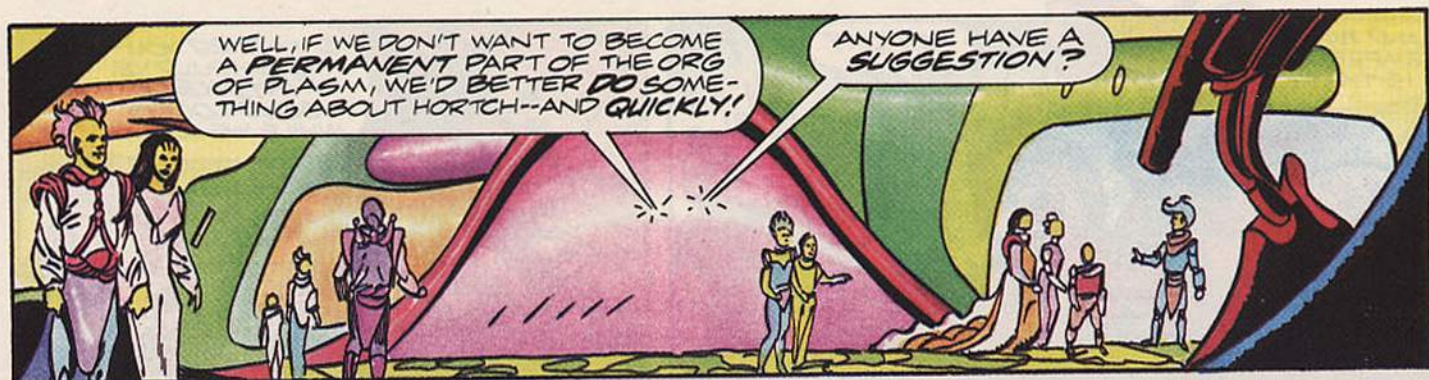
...I'M CERTAIN
DEAR LORCA
CAN BE MADE
TO SEE THE
LIGHT.

SO YOU KEEP
SAYING...

THEY'RE
THE ONES
WHO
INCITED
HIM TO
REVOLU-
TION.

WELL, YOU GET THE
CHANCE TO PROVE
YOUR PET THEORY,
MY EMPEROR...

...VERY
SOON
NOW!







RICK GAVE US AN OPENING, FOLKS.

LET'S MAKE THE MOST OF IT!



NOW THIS IS MORE LIKE IT.

THERE'S A LOT MORE LIGHT OUT HERE FOR ME TO COLLECT AND CONTROL.

GROUND SKIN SAYS IT'S SAFER HEADING THIS WAY....

LIKE IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

WE'RE BADLY OUTNUMBERED NO MATTER WHICH WAY WE TURN!



WE COULD REALLY USE A LITTLE HELP HERE!

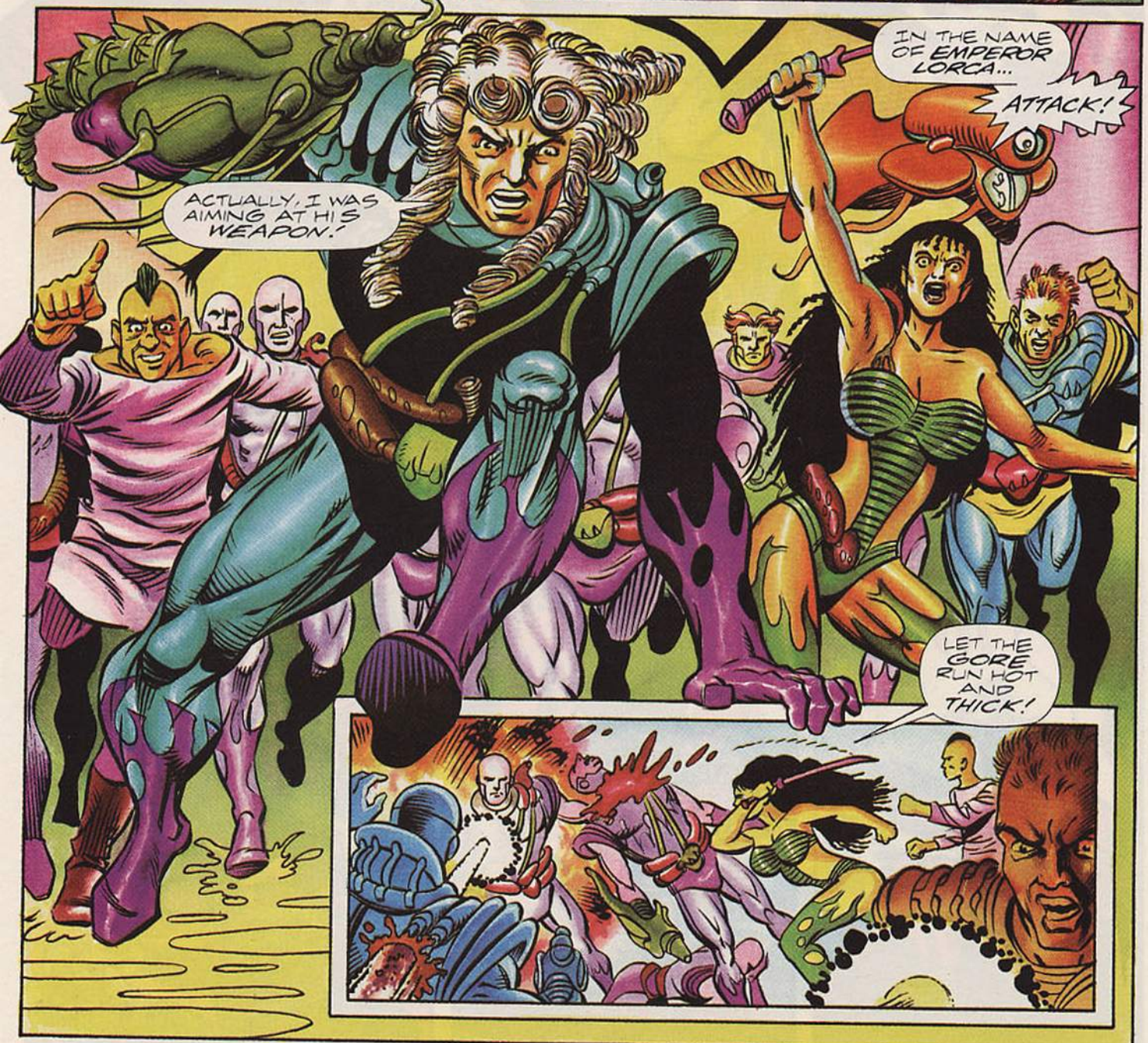
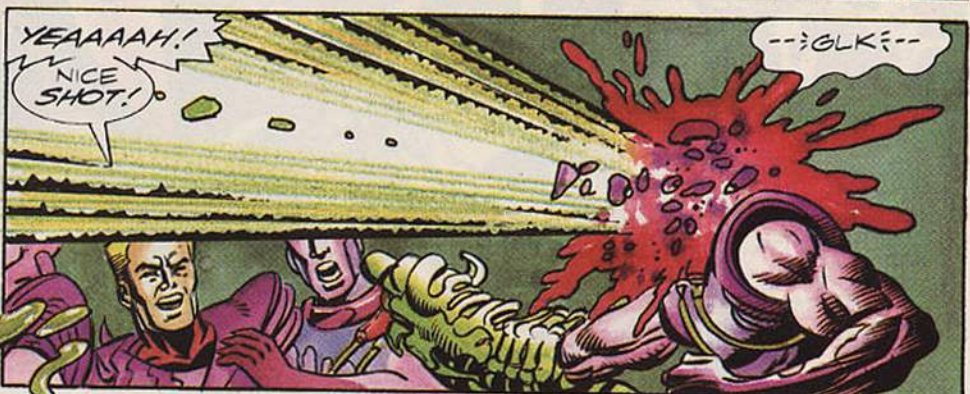
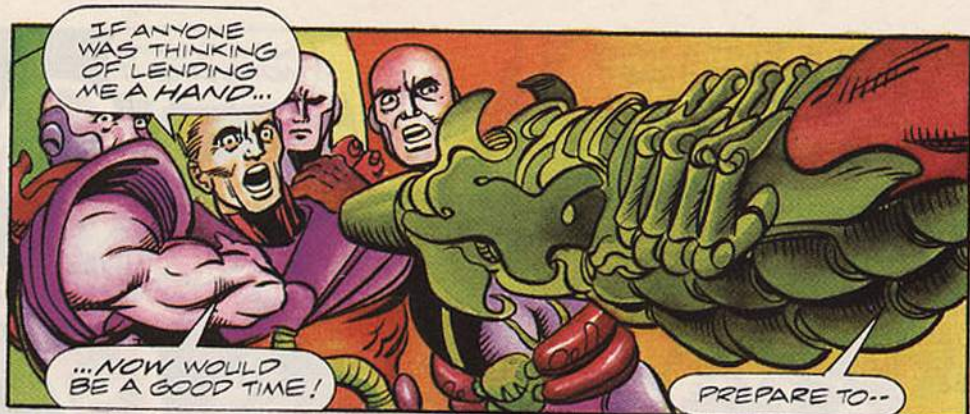


ON ITS WAY, MY FRIEND...



THESE GEEKS NEVER LEARN, DO THEY?

THEY'RE NOT BRED FOR LEARNING, SHOOTER!





HORTCH'S LOGIC GROWS MORE AND MORE TWISTED...

...THINKING TO PERSUADE ME BY DESTROYING MY ALLIES!



WELL, YOU REALLY HAVEN'T LEFT ME ANY OTHER CHOICE, HAVE YOU?

HORTCH?!



OR A REASONABLE FACSIMILE THEREOF.

WE REALLY NEED TO TALK, YOU AND I.



WHAT YOU REALLY NEED MOST, MAD-MAN IS MULCHING!



LOOK, THERE'S NO REASON FOR YOU TO BE LIKE THIS.

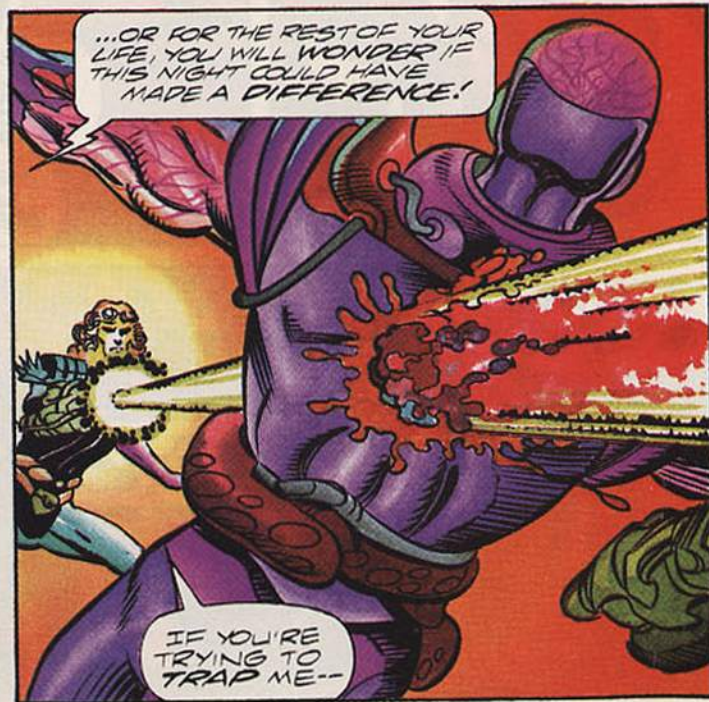
WE BOTH WANT THE SAME THING-- WHAT'S BEST FOR THE ORG!



THIS CONFLICT CAN CONTINUE FOREVER--OR WE CAN ACT NOW TO RESOLVE IT!

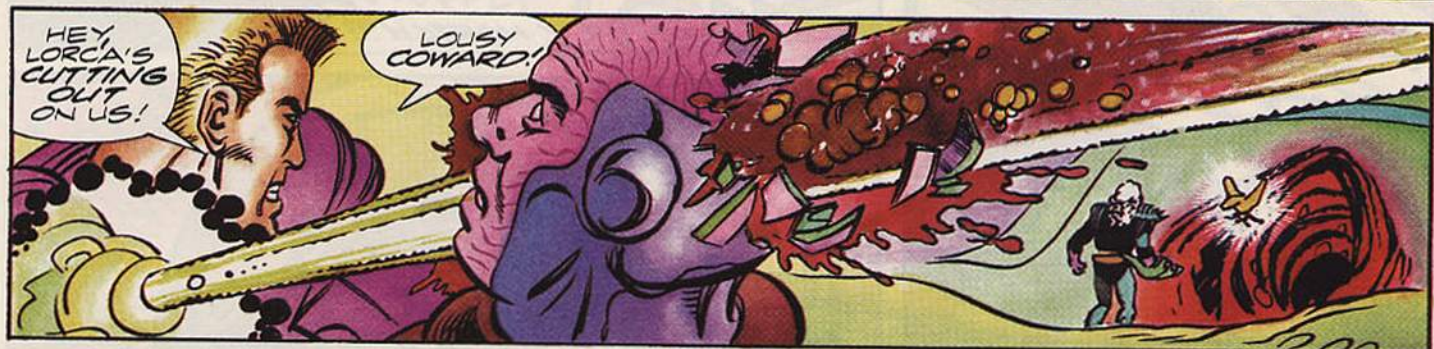
WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING?

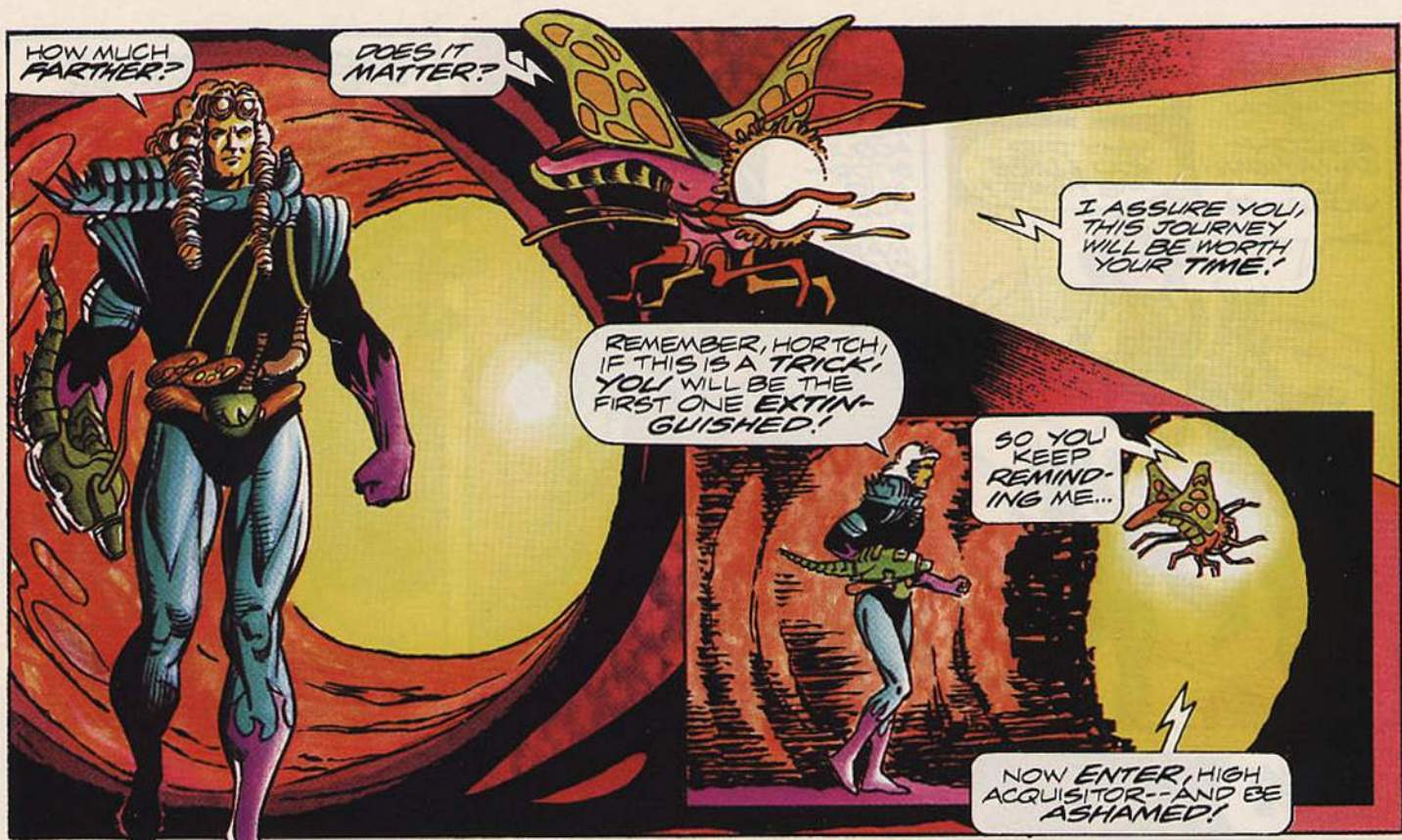
COME SEE ME AND I'LL EXPLAIN...



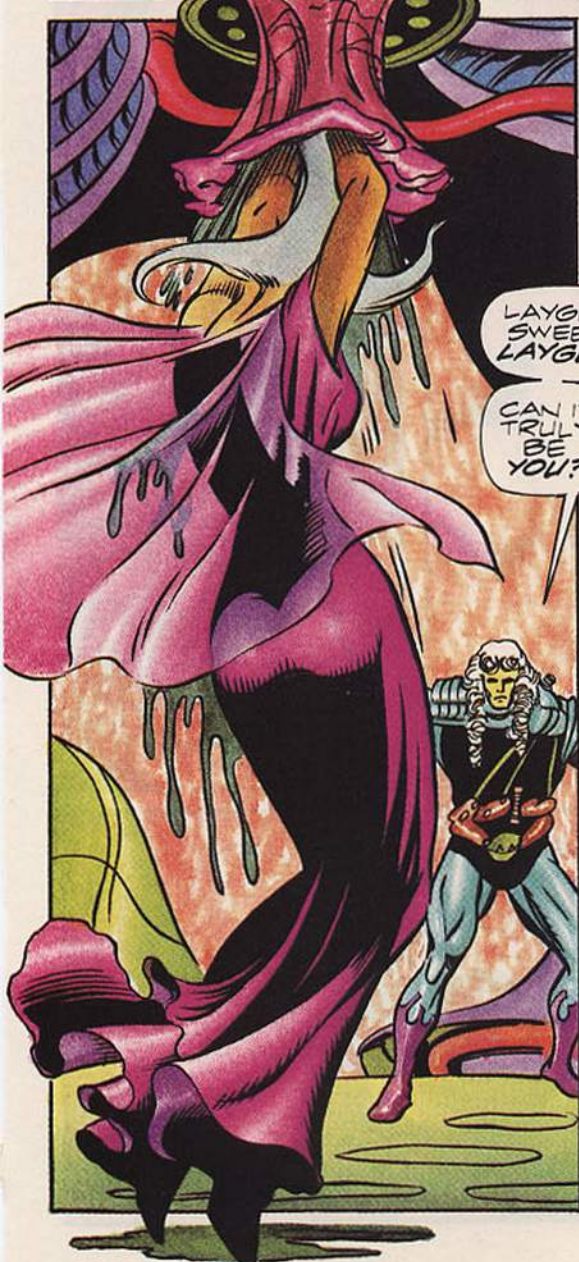
...OR FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, YOU WILL WONDER IF THIS NIGHT COULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE!

IF YOU'RE TRYING TO TRAP ME--

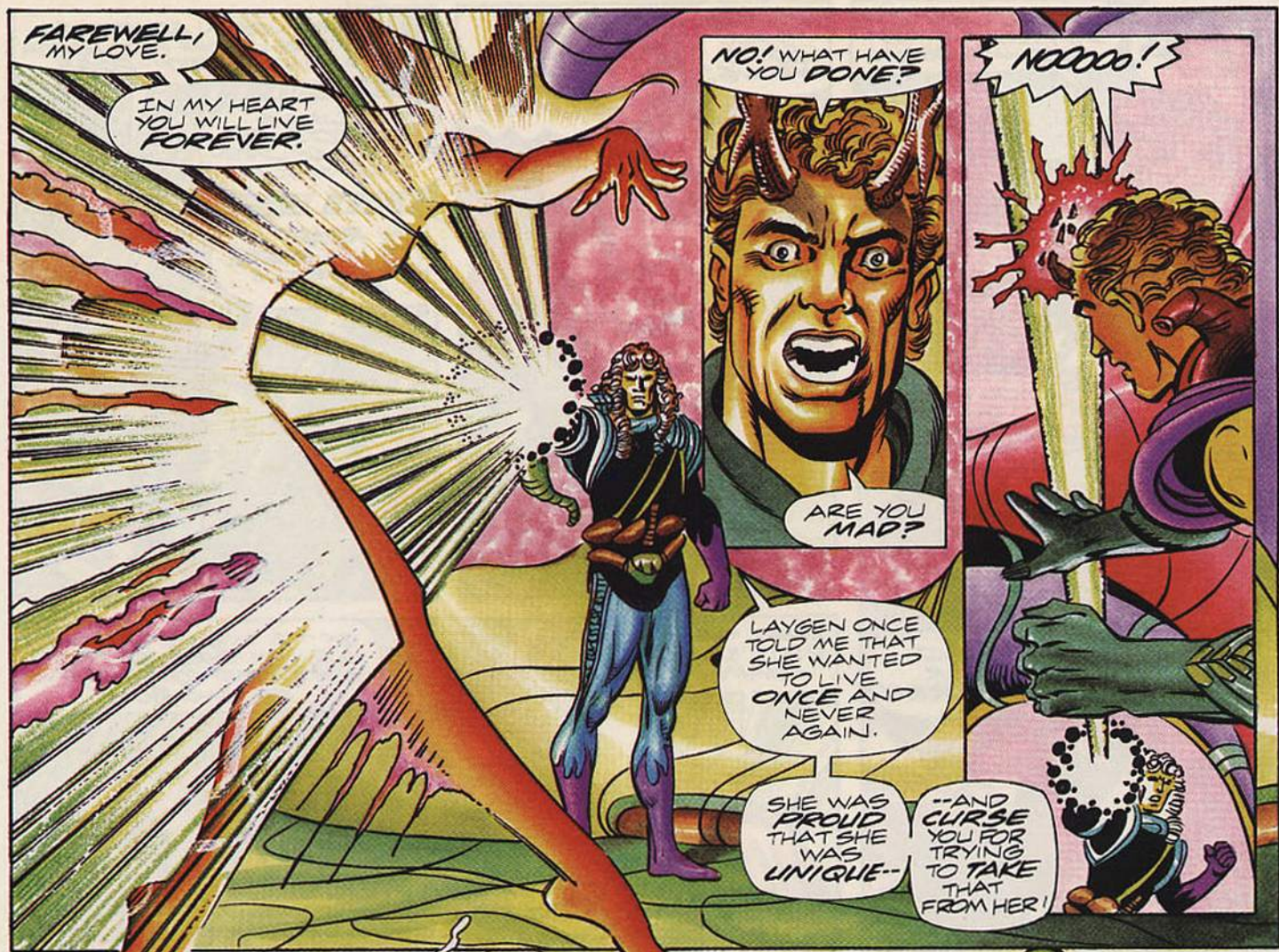














WE SAW
WHAT YOU
JUST DID,
SON!

AND WE KNOW HOW
DIFFICULT IT MUST
HAVE BEEN!

YOU HAVE
OUR
SYMPATHY
BUDDY--

--AND
OUR
SUPPORT!



NO! THIS
IS ALL
GOING
WRONG!

HELP ME,
WORLD-
MOTHER!
PLEASE, I
BEG OF YOU--
HELP ME!



GROUND SKIN ERUPTING--
CUTTING US OFF FROM LORCA
AND HIS EARTH-DOGS.

GANGLIANUS
PROTECTS HER
FAITHFUL CHILDREN,
THORAXOLIC.

NOW **RUN!**
LET'S NOT **WASTE**
HER GENEROUS
GIFT!



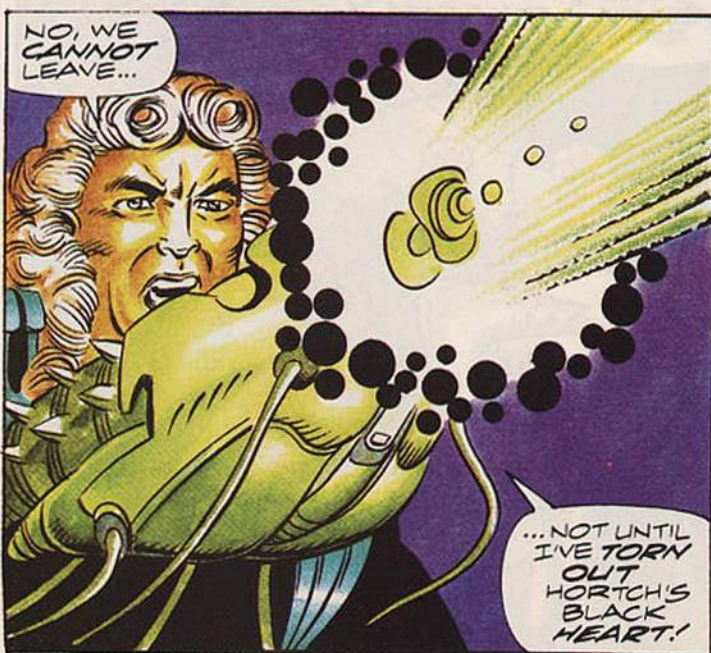
DRAAT, THEY
DID IT TO US
AGAIN.

BY THE TIME WE CAN CUT
OUR WAY THROUGH THAT,
HORTCH AND COMPANY WILL
BE LONG GONE.



AND MAYBE WE
OUGHT TO FOLLOW
THEIR LEAD, FOLKS--
WHILE WE STILL
CAN.

LOOKS LIKE THE TUNNEL
THAT LED US DOWN HERE
IS CLOSING.



NO, WE
CANNOT
LEAVE...

...NOT UNTIL
I'VE TORN
OUT
HORTCH'S
BLACK
HEART!



SOME OTHER
DAY, LORCA.

RIGHT NOW WE
HAVE TO GO--BE-
FORE THIS WHOLE
PLACE COLLAPSES
AROUND US!



C'MON GANG--LET'S HUSTLE!

THE TUNNEL IS CONSTRICTING BEHIND US!

YOU SNOOZE, TROOPS, AND YOU LOSE-- BIG TIME!

GET THE POINT, MOUSE?



I KEEP TELLING YOU, SHOOTER...

...JUST BECAUSE I'M BIG DOESN'T MEAN I'M SLOW.

SHULK!



ESPECIALLY WHEN SLOW AROUND HERE MEANS THE SAME THING AS DEAD.



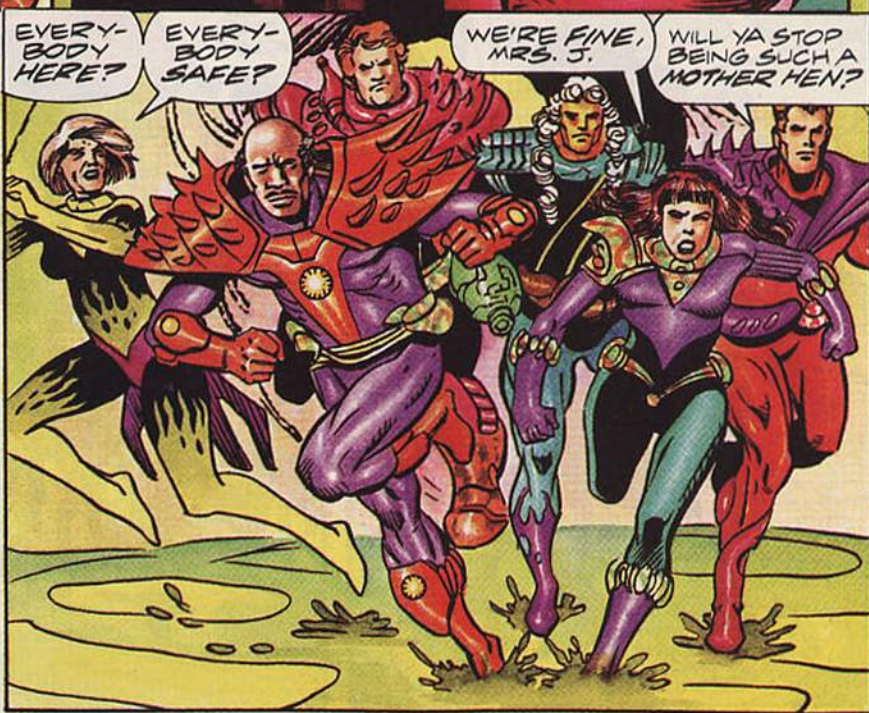
BETTER FOLLOW MRS. J'S LEAD, GANG...

...IF YOU DON'T WANT TO END UP DIGESTED.



I KEEP TRYING TO TALK TO THE TUNNEL-- TO MAKE IT RELAX-- BUT IT WON'T LISTEN TO ME!

THANK GOD THE WAY OUT IS JUST AHEAD!

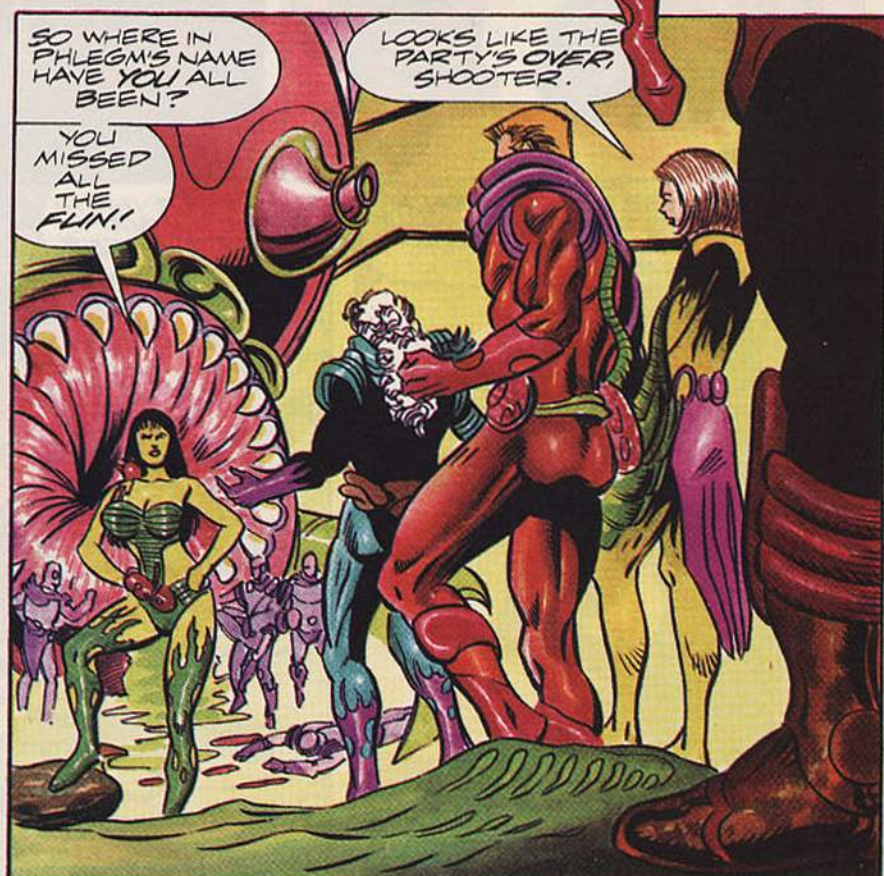
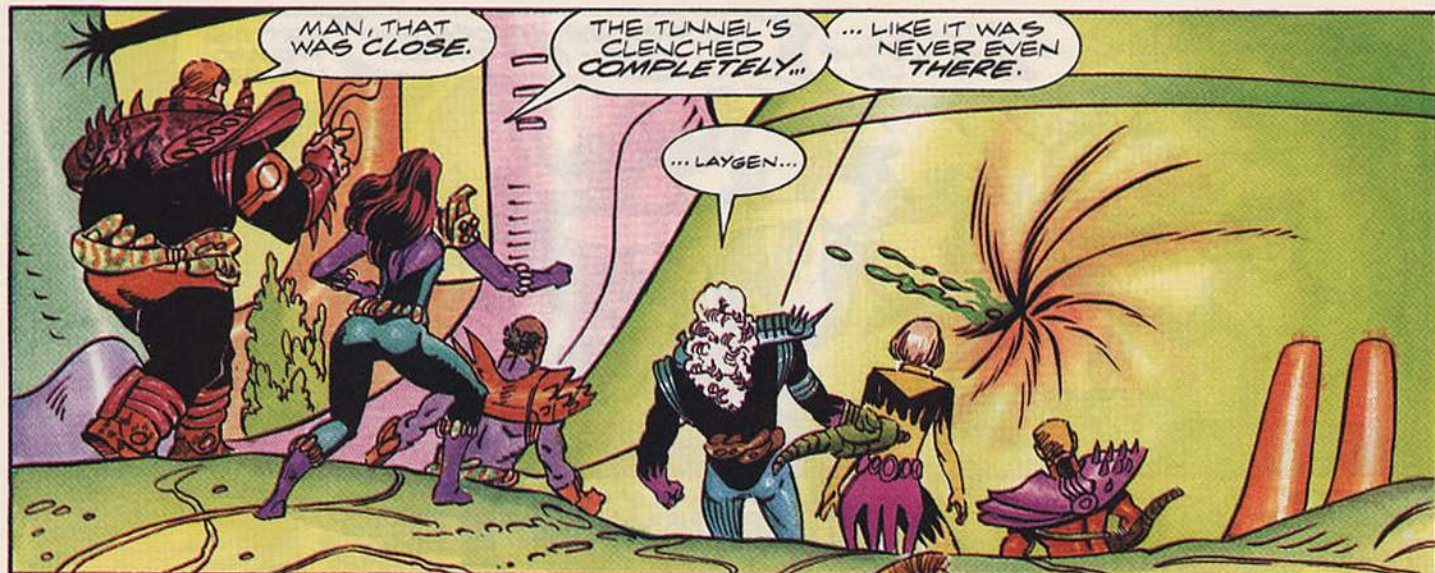


EVERY-BODY HERE?

EVERY-BODY SAFE?

WE'RE FINE, MRS. J.

WILL YA STOP BEING SUCH A MOTHER HEN?





LATER, IN THE PALACE OF THE EMPEROR...

WELL, THERE'S NO TRACE OF HORTCH...

...AND SUERACEEN, GRIMMAX, AND THE OTHERS HAVE COMPLETELY ROUTED HIS ZOM ARMY.

NEAR AS I CAN FIGURE IT, EVERYTHING HERE IS PRETTY MUCH BACK TO NORMAL.

OR AS CLOSE AS THIS PLACE EVER COMES TO NORMAL.



BUT IF THERE'S NO ONE LEFT TO FIGHT, WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO HERE?

THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE, FRIEND SHOOTER...



HUH?!

... YOU GO HOME TO YOUR WORLD!

WHAT ARE YOU JABBERING ABOUT, COB?



LOOK AROUND YOU, FRIEND SHOOTER.

YOU HAVE DONE A GREAT DEAL TO HELP US...

EVERYTHING ABOUT THE ORG IS AS YOU HAVE WANTED IT TO BE.

... BUT IT IS TIME WE LEARNED TO TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES.



WELL, LORCA DOES SEEM TO HAVE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL...

AND EVEN IF HE DOES MAKE ANOTHER MISTAKE NOW AND THEN--

-- WE ARE HERE TO HELP HIM FIND HIS WAY.



SO WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE, PEOPLE?



THAT'S EASY, WAZZEN-EGGER--

WE GET THE HELL OUT OF DODGE CITY.

EPILOGUE THE FIRST

HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY,
THE HOME OF PHILIP AND
ALICE TIETZ

THIS ONE'S
FOR YOU,
MA.

CAREFUL.
IT FEELS
HEAVY.

THANK YOU,
MIKEY DEAR.

I'M SURE WHAT-
EVER IT IS, IT'S
WONDERFUL.



GEE-- LHM--
WHAT SHOULD
WE DO WITH
THIS ONE?

IT'S FROM
BOTH OF
YOU TO
RICK.

WELL, IF IT'S GOT
ANYTHING **BREAKABLE**
IN IT, YOU'D BETTER
NOT DROP IT...



... GUESS YOU'VE
ALREADY GOT A
TREE, HUH?

...OH, MY
LORD...

RICHARD?

HEY, RICK!
WHERE YOU
BEEN, BRO?



AND WHY
ARE YOU
DRESSED
LIKE
SOMETHING
OUT OF
"STAR
WARS"?

LONG STORY,
DAD. I'LL
EXPLAIN IT ALL
LATER.

IMPORTANT
QUESTION
NOW IS--

-- WHEN DO
WE EAT?



EPILOGUE THE SECOND

MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY, THE FIRST EPISCOPAL CHURCH...

O, COME, ALL YE FAITH-FUL...



...JOY-FUL AND TRI-UM-PHANT...



O, COME YE, O, CO-OME YE TO BE-ETH-LE-HEM...



COME AND BEHOLD HIM, BORN THE KING OF A-AN-GELES...



O, COME, LET US ADORE HIM...

...O, COME, LET US ADORE HIM...



...O, COME, LET US A-D-ORE HI-IM...



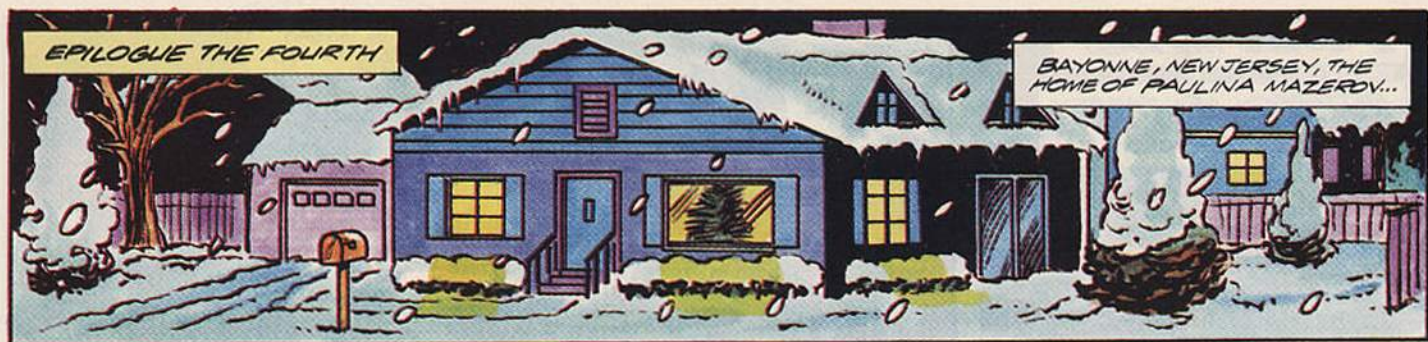
...CHRI-ST THE LORD...





EPILOGUE THE FOURTH

BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY, THE HOME OF PAULINA MAZERD...



SUCH A BIG BIRD FOR ONLY ONE PERSON...

IT'S NOT RIGHT FOR THE ARMY RESERVE TO KEEP A BOY OUT ON MANEUVERS LIKE THIS OVER THE HOLIDAYS...

JUST WISH I KNEW WHERE HE IS RIGHT NOW, AND THAT HE'S SAFE...



HE'S RIGHT WHERE HE OUGHT TO BE, MOM.

ELVIS?!

HERE...LET ME DO THAT.



BUT WHERE... HOW...?

AND WHY ARE YOU WEARING THAT SILLY HALLOWEEN COSTUME?

SORRY, MOM. THAT'S CLASSIFIED, NEED-TO-KNOW STUFF.



NOW YOU JUST SIT BACK AND LET ME CARVE, OKAY?



SO...DO YOU WANT WHITE MEAT OR DARK?



LEN WEIN

Len Wein has written nearly every major title in the comics business, from *Superman*, *Batman*, *The Justice League*, *The Flash*, *Green Lantern*, and *Wonder Woman* at DC to *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *The Fantastic Four* for Marvel. His credits also include cocreation of *Swamp Thing* and *The Human Target* for DC, *Wolverine* and the new *X-MEN* (with Dave Cockrum) for Marvel, and scripts for the animated TV series "Batman," "X-MEN," and the forthcoming "Phantom 2040" and "Spectacular Spider-Man." As well, he has held the positions of Editor-in-Chief and Cover Editor at Marvel, Senior Editor at DC, and Editor-in-Chief at Disney Comics. Originally from the Bronx, New York, Wein lives in Southern California with his wife, Christine Valada, a photographer and attorney, and their son, Michael. Of his career, Wein says, "It's what I've wanted to do ever since I was a kid. When I was seven, I got sick, and my father brought a huge stack of comics to the hospital. That was it—from then on, I trained to be a comics writer!" Wein currently writes the monthly series *DARK DOMINION™* and *WARRIORS OF PLASM™* for *DEFIANT™*.

DAVE COCKRUM

Dave Cockrum began his comic book career in 1970 with *Vampirella* #11 (Warren), and from 1972 to 1974 he worked for DC inking *Superman* backgrounds under Murphy Anderson and penciling *Legion of Superheroes*. In 1975 he developed the new *X-MEN* with Len Wein for Marvel (*GIANT-SIZED X-MEN* #1), then penciled the regular *X-MEN* title, beginning with *The Uncanny X-MEN* #94. Cockrum created such classic *X-MEN* characters as Nightcrawler, Storm, Thunderbird, Phoenix, Colossus, and the Brood. He also created *The Futurians* graphic novel for Marvel's Epic line and recently penciled issues of *Green Lantern Corps* and *Wonder Woman* for DC and covers for Topps' *Jurassic Park*. Originally from the Midwest, Cockrum studied at Southern Illinois University and Colorado State, then concentrated on perfecting his craft when he left school to join the Navy. He lives in upstate New York with his wife, Paty, a well-known colorist in the industry.

KEITH WILSON

Keith Wilson began his career in comics in the early 1980s, inking *Three Badgers* for First, then *Robotech* and *The Elementals* for Comico. After serving as Cover Editor at DC

in the mid-'80s, he returned to inking, working on *The Power of the Atom* and *Angel and the Ape*, among other titles. In 1992 he, Tom Joyner, and Chris Sprouse cocreated DC's *Hammerlocke*; a year later, he, Joyner, and Jim Fern teamed their talents to create *Scarlette*. He has also worked for Upper Deck, illustrating their Comic Ball trading-card sets featuring Looney Tunes characters. Born in Anchorage, Alaska, Wilson says he grew up during the golden age of Saturday morning superhero cartoons (the '60s) and has been drawn to comics ever since. He holds an associate's degree in commercial art and advertising and lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife, Carrie, a speech therapist.

GEORGE ROBERTS

George Roberts has been in the comics business since 1982, working as a colorist and production artist at DC and as a paste-up artist and letterer at Marvel and Valiant. He currently devotes his talents full-time as a letterer for *DEFIANT*. Raised in Valhalla, New York, Roberts says that as a child he'd trace comics to get his parents' attention. "I'd hold up a perfectly traced Casper the Ghost and say, 'Look what I've done!' My Dad was so [mistakenly] impressed that he took me to an art school one Saturday. I sat down in front of the easel, and all I could draw was the Batman insignia. My father and I were so embarrassed that I decided then and there to be an artist." In time Roberts studied at the School of Visual Arts, New York Technical College, and Parsons School of Design. He lives in Yonkers, New York.

OCLAIR ALBERTO SILVÉRIO

Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, Oclair Alberto Silvério began drawing at the age of six and has been passionate about art ever since—it is "in his blood," he says. At age 12 he became inspired by superhero comics, particularly those by the legendary Gil Kane. A completely self-taught artist, Silvério worked as an advertising illustrator and layout artist after college but kept his sights on the American comic book industry, that in Brazil being too small to offer a viable career path. His next assignment is *DEFIANT*'s forthcoming title *CHARLEMAGNE™*, which he will paint in São Paulo, where he lives with his wife, Denise, and his 10-month-old son, Lucas Vitor. An ardent runner, Silvério's next *personal* goal is to run in the New York City Marathon.

